

## Danish bare singular count nouns in subject position<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at investigating under which conditions Danish Bare Singular Count Nouns (BSCNs) can function as subjects in standard categorical statements, i.e. outside special discourse types such as proverbs, newspaper headlines, titles of paintings, etc. Taking as a point of departure a brief discussion of the distributional differences between, on the one hand, Bare Plural count nouns (BPs) and mass nouns and, on the other, BSCNs, it is shown that, contrary to BP- and mass noun subjects, BSCNs in subject position are non-referential and do not imply existential presupposition. On these grounds, and on the basis of analyses of phenomena such as agreement features, genericity and pseudo-incorporation, it is argued that the BSCN-subjects of categorical statements are objects which, owing to the lack of realisation of nominal functional categories, act as property-denoting modifiers restricting the denotation of a covert predicate. Consequently, it is concluded that BSCNs in subject position do not function as arguments in themselves, but are instead pseudo-incorporated into the covert predicate as modifiers.

**Keywords:** Bare noun subjects, covert predicates, event denotation, genericity, predicative adjectives, pseudo-incorporation, qualia structure, relations of telicity and possession.

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to study the conditions under which Bare Singular Count Nouns (BSCNs) occur as subjects in Danish categorical statements, as in (1).

- (1) **Pibe** er usundt.<sup>2</sup>  
*pipe is unhealthy*  
'To smoke (a) pipe is unhealthy.'

The main issue that is addressed in this paper is that the type of subject-BSCNs discussed below are actually non-argument modifiers which pseudo-incorporate into a covert predicate, as in *at ryge pibe* 'to smoke (a) pipe'. Consequently, rather than individuals, the relevant subject-BSCNs are analysed as property-denoting event modifiers which restrict the denotational scope of the V (the covert predicate) so that the V+BSCN structure names a subtype of the V's denotation.<sup>3</sup> Together, the V and the BSCN form a complex unit of meaning which denotes either an activity event, as e.g. the activity of pipe-smoking in (1), or a 'possessive event' (exemplified later in the paper) (see also Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006; Dayal 2011; Müller 2017). The paper focusses mainly on Danish, but also draws on evidence from the two other mainland Scandinavian languages, Norwegian and Swedish.

The issue of BSCNs being licensed in subject position is interesting from both an empirical and a theoretical perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of the ideas behind this study was presented at the yearly seminar of the Danish Grammar Network in the autumn of 2017. I wish to express my gratitude to the participants at this venue for their helpful comments and invaluable suggestions. A preliminary and very simplified outline of parts of the analysis has been published in Danish (Müller 2018).

<sup>2</sup> The bare noun is shown in bold in the numbered examples throughout the paper. Where no source is mentioned, the example has been constructed, or it is considered a common expression in Danish.

<sup>3</sup> Here, 'individuals' refer to the objects denoted by the arguments of a well-formed sentence, while 'properties' correspond to what is predicated about them.

It is well-known that in languages that have articles the distribution of BSCNs is usually strongly restricted in comparison with that of Bare Plurals (BPs) and bare mass nouns and, of course, even more so if their limited occurrence is accounted for in contrast with fully-fledged Determiner Phrases (DPs).<sup>4</sup> This is also the case in Danish (see e.g. Müller 2017), but overall the mainland Scandinavian languages are comparatively tolerant when it comes to licensing BSCNs both in predicative positions and in non-predicative ones, either as object arguments or arguments of prepositions (although taking very different approaches, see e.g. Hansen & Heltoft 2011 for Danish; Faarlund et al. 1997 for Norwegian and Delsing 1993 for Swedish).

Apart from traditional works, which in many cases mention the generic ‘flavour’ associated with the interpretation of bare nouns (see e.g. Mikkelsen 1975[1911]; Hansen 1927, 1967; Hansen & Lund 1983; Hansen 2001[1994]), Danish linguistic literature has focused mainly on the incorporation of BSCNs (and BPs) in object position into the V and almost completely disregarded the possibility of their surfacing as subjects (see Nedergaard Thomsen 1991; Herslund 1994, 1995; Asudeh & Mikkelsen 2000; Nedergaard Thomsen & Herslund 2002; Petersen 2010, 2011, 2013; Hansen & Heltoft 2011; Müller 2017). In fact, with the exception of Borthen’s (2003) extensive work on BSCNs in Norwegian, including Grønn’s (2006) and Rosén & Borthen’s (2017) papers on particular aspects of the same topic, the Scandinavian literature on bare nouns either neglects BSCNs in subject position or explicitly states that they hardly ever occur as subjects.<sup>5</sup> The analysis presented in this paper shares important theoretical aspects with Borthen (2003: 212-223, 332-336), and also the examples discussed are to some extent overlapping with Borthen (2003: 212-223). Specifically, the present paper follows Borthen’s approach in assuming that Danish BSCNs in subject position are licensed by a covert predicate, and that Pustejovsky’s (1995: 85-104) qualia structure can be used to predict what predicates are likely to be inferred. However, the analysis conducted here, in broad terms, differs from that of Borthen by its emphasis on interpreting BSCNs as modifiers pseudo-incorporated into the covert predicate, and by drawing on the concept of ‘pancake sentences’ (see e.g. Josefsson 2009).

As for the theoretical perspective, the challenge of developing an elegant, unified theory that reconciles apparent contradictions between the structure of nominals, their syntactic position and the status of argumenthood has been on the agenda as a minimum since the seminal work by Carlson (1977a) on the semantics of bare nominals in English. Notably the works of Longobardi (1994, 2001) and Chierchia (1998) have been very influential and much debated, as well as criticised, internationally, because they offer a cross-linguistic explanation for the mapping between syntactic structure and semantics within the nominal domain. Briefly stated, Longobardi’s (1994, 2001) approach, based on a clear distinction between predicative and non-predicative positions, predicts that in order to occur in argument position a nominal must be a DP. Following this line of reasoning, BSCNs can occur only in predicative positions, as they do not (overtly at least) project a DP level. According to Chierchia’s (1998) classification of languages, which builds on the potential denotation of their NPs, in the Germanic (and Romance) languages NPs, and not only DPs, can be names of kinds, i.e. function as arguments. However, in order for bare NPs to be argumental, i.e. to be type-

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this is why especially DPs/NPs, but also BPs and mass nouns, in the main seem to have received much more attention from scholars than BSCNs (see e.g. Carlson 1999 for a comprehensive outline of the literature on bare nouns, and Le Bruyn et al. 2017 for a cross-linguistic view on the grammar and meaning of bare nominals).

<sup>5</sup> Also in a broader cross-linguistic perspective, works on BSCNs focus primarily on their occurrence in object or predicative position, probably for the very good reason that in most languages they are simply not licensed as subjects (see e.g. Kiefer 1994 and Farkas & de Swart 2003 for Hungarian, Kallulli 1999 for Albanian; Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006 and Dobrovie-Sorin 2009 for Romanian; Espinal & McNally 2007, 2008, 2011 and Espinal 2010 for Spanish and Catalan; Zamparelli 2008 for singular predicate nominals in the Romance languages; Booij 2009 for Dutch; Stvan 2009 for English; Dayal 2011 for Hindi). However, Schmitt & Munn (1999, 2005) show that BSCNs can occur in subject argument position in Brazilian Portuguese, but importantly they are number neutral DPs and thus differ radically from the Danish BSCN subjects analysed in this paper.

lifted/shifted from predicates of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$  to kinds of type  $\langle e \rangle$ , they have to be BPs or mass terms, which once again excludes BSCNs from argument positions (see also Grønn 2006: 76-77).

This paper contributes to the understanding of how BSCNs – without denoting individuals or generalised quantifiers, i.e. without having the denotation of canonical DP-arguments, or denoting in the plural domain – as property-denoting constituents can occupy the subject position in Danish categorical statements.

### 1.1. Some notes of clarification

In this context, bare nouns are informally defined as nominal constituents which appear unaccompanied by left peripheral elements expressing functional categories (e.g., articles, quantifiers, demonstratives or possessors), and are morphologically unmarked for definiteness by suffixation.<sup>6</sup>

With respect to the distinction between count and mass nouns employed in the paper, it is generally assumed, following e.g. Moltman (1997) and Müller (2014), that mass nouns show cumulativity and divisivity of reference, i.e. they denote homogeneous entities, such as *sand* or *blood*, which can be cumulated or divided into smaller parts without changing ontological status. Popularly speaking, *sand* will still be sand if more sand is added to it, or if it is divided into portions. By contrast, count nouns, such as *pipe* and *violin*, denote heterogeneous entities, which, if dissected or cumulated, will turn into different types of objects. For instance, a piece of a pipe does not qualify as a pipe in itself, and more violins do not constitute the same kind of object as one single violin.<sup>7</sup> However, as is the case in many other languages, Danish nouns are to a large extent open to recategorisation, cf. the contrast between e.g. *købe hund* ‘buy (a) dog’ and *spise hund* ‘eat dog (meat)’, or *bruge sæbe* ‘use soap’ and *sælge sæbe-r* ‘sell soap-PL’.

A question that arises in this context is the meaning of ‘singular’. When used as part of the BSCN-expression, this term exclusively refers to the morphological surface form of the nominal expression, as BSCNs are often semantically number neutral and, thus, do not contrast with the plural (see e.g. Hansen 1967: 167; Müller 2017: 60-63).

Finally, it is important to note that the present paper deals only with BSCNs occurring in the subject position of categorical (predicative) sentences, since BSCN-subjects ofthetic (existential) sentences – although their occurrence is also restricted to some extent – seem to appear both more freely and, perhaps more importantly, to be governed by radically different principles from the former, probably due to their resemblance to syntactic objects (see Borthen 2003: 176-179 and the specific comments in section 2.2).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, given the fact that Danish is a strict V2 language, i.e. the subject of any main clause will appear in post-verbal position if another constituent, e.g. an adverbial, an object, an interrogative, etc., is fronted, word order in itself does not mark the difference between categorical/predicative sentences andthetic/existential sentences. However, prototypically categorical sentences have SV word order, while the subject always surfaces in post-position in existential *der* (‘there’)-constructions.

<sup>6</sup> In the mainland Scandinavian languages definiteness is marked with a suffix, as e.g. in the Danish expression *hund* ‘dog’ – *hund-en* ‘dog-DEF’.

<sup>7</sup> I here disregard the insight from cognitive linguistics that certain entities can be seen as having a core part, which according to Croft & Cruse (2004: 156) is the smallest possible portion of an X that can be construed as a whole X. One could, of course, imagine that a pipe would have such a core part and that this part may substitute for the whole (see also Aitchison 1994: 55 concerning prototype theory).

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the distinction between categorical andthetic statements, see e.g. Kuroda (1972) and Ladusaw (1994). Following these authors and many others, it is in the present paper assumed that existential *there*-constructions are inherentlythetic and, therefore, the terms ‘existential’ and ‘thetic’ are used indiscriminately.

### 1.2. Structure of the paper

The remainder of this paper is divided into four parts. **Section 2** contrasts the distribution in subject position of BPs and mass terms with that of BSCNs. It is shown that the distribution of subject-BSCNs is strongly restricted, but also that – apart from functioning more or less sporadically as DP projections in several standardised discourse types – they can occur in regular categorical sentences under certain conditions. **Section 3** argues that BSCN-subjects of categorical sentences should be interpreted as objects of a covert predicate. The argumentation is based on an analysis of factors such as adjectival agreement features, mass vs. event reading of the BSCN, as well as its interpretation in terms of genericity. **Section 4** studies the relation between the covert predicate and the BSCN, and it is substantiated that the BSCN acts syntactically as a modifier that is pseudo-incorporated into the covert predicate. Together, the BSCN-modifier and the covert predicate form a complex unit, V+BSCN, which either denotes an activity event or a possessive event. In **Section 5**, the main conclusions of the paper are summarised and a brief discussion is provided of how the facts described in the paper fit into a more general consideration of principles of mapping between syntax and semantics.

## 2. Distribution

Although bare nouns in Danish, understood as comprising the three categories of BSCNs, BPs and mass terms, occur in predicative as well as in non-predicative positions, both as verbal (subjects/objects) and prepositional arguments (see e.g. Petersen 2010, 2011; Hansen & Heltoft 2011; Müller 2014, 2017), the following outline concentrates on their function as subjects, given the topic of this paper.

### 2.1. BPs and mass terms as subjects

The following examples show that BPs and mass terms – which in Danish, as well as in many other languages, pattern together in various ways, for instance by admitting many of the same determiners (see e.g. Jackendoff 1991: 19) and appearing essentially in the same basic syntactic positions – occur unconstrained as subjects of both categorical (2) and existential,thetic statements (3).<sup>9</sup>

- (2) **Løve-r/mudder** ødelægger mange landsby-er.<sup>10</sup>  
*lion-PL/mud destroy(s) many village-PL*  
 ‘Lions/mud destroy(s) many villages.’
- (3) Der ligger **løve-r/mudder** ved sø-en.  
*there lie(s) lion-PL/mud by lake-DET*  
 ‘There are/is lions/mud by the lake.’

When BPs and mass terms are used as subjects of pure, context-less categorical statements, they are interpreted generically, while an episodic reading can be obtained, for instance, by embedding the same statement under a matrix clause that places it in a specific situation, as in [*Jeg har set [løve ødelægge mange landsbyer]*] ‘I have seen lions destroy many villages’. The existential reading of (3) is induced by using the locative subject marker *der* ‘there’ as a formal subject (see

<sup>9</sup> According to Dobrovie-Sorin et al.’s (2006) analysis of bare nouns in the Romance languages, BPs and mass nouns are both projections of the functional category Number, i.e. syntactically they are NumPs, which to a large extent provides an explanation for their distributional co-occurrence. BSCNs, on the other hand, are essentially lexical projections of nouns, i.e. NPs, and, thus, belong to a different syntactic category, which means that we can also expect a distribution different from that of BPs and mass nouns.

<sup>10</sup> Here and in the following examples, the single slash separates individual words, while a double slash indicates separation of sentences or expressions consisting of several words.

Müller 2017 for a more comprehensive discussion of Danish BPs and mass nouns in argument position).

## 2.2. BSCNs as subjects

The next three examples point to the well-known fact that Danish BSCNs are normally not licensed in subject position, neither in categorical sentences with generic or episodic readings as in (4) and (5), nor in existential sentences as in (6) (see also Müller 2015: 200, 2017: 45).

- (4) \***Løve** spiser grøntsag-er.  
*lion eats vegetable-PL*
- (5) \***Løve** løber gennem have-n.  
*lion runs through garden-DET*
- (6) \*Der ligger **løve** ved sø-en.<sup>11</sup>  
*there lies lion by lake-DET*

Exceptions to this tendency of not licensing BSCNs in subject position are special types of discourse such as proverbs, specific subject-related descriptions, newspaper headlines, titles of pictures, etc., cf. (7)-(10) below (see also Hansen 1927: 12-22, 1967: 166-173, in which further BSCN-endorsing contexts are mentioned, and Borthen 2003: 17 for similar examples in Norwegian).

- (7) **Tyv** tror hver mand stjæler.  
*thief thinks every man steals*  
'The jaundiced eye sees all things yellow.'
- (8) **Gulerod** vokser stadig vildt i stor-e del-e af Europa.  
*carrot grows still wild in large-PL part-PL of Europe*  
'The carrot still grows wild in large parts of Europe.'  
<https://opskrifter.coop.dk/madleksikon/ingrediens/540> (accessed 26 of July 2022)
- (9) **Politimand** dræber demonstrant.  
*policeman kills demonstrator*  
'Policeman kills protester.'
- (10) **Barn** spiser æble.  
*child eats apple*  
'Child eats an apple.'

It should further be noted in this context that the BSCN-subjects in (7) and (8) have generic reference, while *politimand* 'policeman' in (9) and *barn* 'child' in (10) have specific reference – in the case of (9) the subject referent can be understood as both identifiable and non-identifiable. In addition, some relational nouns, typically role-denoting nouns such as kinship terms (*mor* 'mother', *onkel* 'uncle') and nouns of professions (*rektor* 'principal', *dyrlæge* 'veterinarian'), may also appear in bare form as referential subjects (see e.g. Hansen 1993: 16; Pedersen 1993: 21).

<sup>11</sup> In (6), it would be possible to interpret *løve* 'lion' as connoting a non-distinct quantity (lion meat), i.e. a mass as opposed to a whole, discrete object, and in this case the example is not ungrammatical.

The examples presented so far lead to two interrelated considerations. First, given the fact that cross-linguistically the subject position of bipartite categorical statements usually requires strong (as opposed to weak) nominals in the sense of Milsark (1977) (see also Vangsnes' 2001 determiner classification), it is to be expected that the BSCNs in (7)-(10) must be interpreted as uniquely referential. This is a natural consequence of the inherent semantic and pragmatic prominence of the subject position in bipartite structures (see Rothstein 2004: 17-18). Second, it is not surprising that BSCNs generally show reluctance towards appearing in subject position, since they lack projection of a functional structure that permits them to be obvious candidates for argumenthood. Consequently, it is with good reason that Danish BSCNs – although strictly speaking not impossible – show a strong tendency not to appear as subjects (see e.g. Hansen 1967: 168-169; Müller 2017: 45).

As illustrated in (6), the subject position of existential sentences is usually also not available for BSCNs, but in this case examples of the following type constitute a systematic exception to the general ban. It should be noted that in the case of (11) the Novelty Condition (see e.g. McNally 1998: 384) generally associated with existential sentences also applies, which means that the BSCN, consistent with the indefinite DP in 'regular' existential structures, is referential and introduces a novel referent into the discourse.

- (11) Der er **bad** og **biograf** i kælder-en.  
*there is bath and cinema in basement-DET*  
 'There is a bath and a cinema in the basement.'

In line with Borthen's (2003: 178-179) assumptions for similar examples in Norwegian, the type of existential,thetic judgments exemplified in (11) could, in view of their expression of availability of the BSCN's denotation, be analysed as analogous to possessive constructions of the type *de har bad og biograf i kælderen* 'they have (a) bath and (a) cinema in the basement', which denote a stereotyped or institutionalised property (Asudeh & Mikkelsen 2000). It is well-known from a number of languages that *have*-predicates (see e.g. Borthen 2003 for Norwegian; Espinal & McNally 2011 for Spanish and Catalan; Dobrovie-Sorin 2009 for Romanian) generally accept BSCNs in object position.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, as compared with the categorical sentences, the relatively reduced prominence of the subject position of existential sentences seemingly makes it more prone to hosting BSCNs, at least within a specific semantic domain. However, this analytical approach related to the concepts of availability/possession will not be pursued further here since this paper, as mentioned earlier, focusses on BSCNs in categorical sentences.

Returning to the central theme of this paper, the following authentic examples indicate that a certain type of data seems to constitute a systematic exception to the generalisation proposed so far that BSCNs are banned from the subject position of Danish categorical sentences.

- (12a) Mange tror, at **vandpibe** er mindre sundhedsskadelig-t end cigaret-ter, men ...  
*many think that water.pipe is less health.harmful-N than cigaret-PL but ...*  
 'Many people think that smoking water pipe is less harmful to health than cigarettes, but ...'  
<https://www.sst.dk/da/Viden/Forebyggelse/Tobak/Fakta-om-tobak-og-rygning/Typer-af-tobaksvarer/Vandpibe> (accessed 29 September 2022)

<sup>12</sup> Borthen (2003: 138-139) mentions that in Norwegian event-denoting BNs can occur in existential sentences, and that in these cases the locative phrase following the BSCN – usually referred to as the *Coda* (see e.g. Leonetti 2008: 139) – is not compulsory. The situation seems to be identical in Danish, e.g. *der er karneval (i København)* 'there is (a) carnival in Copenhagen'.

- (12b) (...) hvorfor **køkkenhave** i **højbed-e** kan være god-t for ryg-gen, (...)
   
 (...) why kitchen.garden in raised.bed-PL can be good-N for back-DET (...)
   
 ‘(...) why kitchen gardens in raised beds can be good for the back, (...)’
   
 <https://haveselskabet.dk/gomorgendanmark> (accessed 26 July 2022)
- (13a) **Pibe** smager mig absolut bedst, når jeg er alene.
   
 pipe tastes me absolutely best when I am alone
   
 ‘I absolutely enjoy pipe smoking most when I am on my own.’
   
 (Weekendavisen, section 1, page 14, 24 March 2017)
- (13b) Ja, **køkkenhave** kræver arbejde, men (...)
   
 yes kitchen.garden demands work but (...)
   
 ‘Yes planting/maintaining a kitchen garden does indeed require a lot of work, but (...)’
   
 <https://tornvig.blogspot.com/2020/05/8-sandheder-om-at-dyrke-kkkenhave.html>
  
 (accessed 26 July 2022)

(13a) comes from the Danish newspaper *Weekendavisen*, while the other examples have been extracted from Google, where it is easy to find similar examples. In (12a) and (12b), the common gender (uter) BSCNs *vandpibe* ‘water pipe’ and *køkkenhave i højbede* ‘kitchen garden in raised beds’ are subjects of copular sentences and, crucially, do not follow the ‘normal’ grammatical rule in Danish of showing gender agreement with the post-copular, predicative adjectives *sundhedsskadeligt* ‘harmful-N to health’ and *godt* ‘good-N’, which, as indicated by the gloss, appear in the neuter (see section 3.1. for a detailed description). Their counterpart examples, (13a) and (13b), represent non-copular constructions with BSCNs in subject position.

The explicit focus on providing examples of both copular and non-copular sentences is prompted by the fact that the generalisations about subject-BSCNs presented in this paper go beyond copular constructions with non-agreeing predicative adjectives, which have been the centre of attention of many Scandinavian linguists, who deal with various types of weakly referential (in the sense of Milsark 1974, 1977) NPs in subject position (see e.g. Faarlund 1977; Hellan 1986; Enger 2004, 2013; Josefsson 2009, 2010).<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it is crucial to recognise that, contrary to the exceptions exemplified in (7)-(10), the BSCNs in (12ab) and (13ab) are non-specific and non-referential in the sense that they do not carry the presupposition or assert that their referents exist. Given that they lack the syntactic structure that maps noun predicates onto argumental DPs, the BSCNs in these last examples do not denote referents identifiable to the interlocutors of some imagined communicative exchange, but rather denote the conceptual content itself, i.e. the idea of a (water) pipe or a kitchen garden. Therefore, as we shall see, the most plausible explanation for their behaviour is that they function as modifiers that restrict the denotation of covert predicates.

### 3. BSCN-subjects as objects of covert predicates

In the following, a number of factors are discussed which aim to show that subject-BSCNs in the type of sentences exemplified in (12ab) and (13ab) above are, in fact, objects of unrealised predicates (according to Pustejovsky 1995 event projection from nominals based on coercion processes extends far beyond BSCNs). This means that the actual subject of the matrix sentence is a verbal construction, an event-denoting predicate, and not the BSCNs per se.

<sup>13</sup> However, data provided by Borthen (2003: 194-223) indicates that Norwegian BSCNs in subject position (and other argument positions) are also not restricted to copular constructions with non-agreeing adjectives.

### 3.1. Agreement of predicative adjectives

As a rule, in standard Danish, as well as in the other mainland Scandinavian languages, adjectival subject and object complements display overt number and gender agreement with the argument they modify, cf. (14ab).

(14a) Pibe-n (den) er dyr. // Pibe-r-ne (de) er dyr-e.  
*pipe-C.DET (it.C)*<sup>14</sup> *is expensive* // *pipe-PL-DET (they) are expensive-PL*  
 ‘The pipe (it) is expensive. // The pipes (they) are expensive.’

(14b) Hus-et (det) er dyr-t. // Hus-e-ne (de) er dyr-e.  
*house-N.DET (it.N) is expensive-N* // *house-PL-DET (they) are expensive-PL*  
 ‘The house (it) is expensive. // The houses (they) are expensive.’

In (14b), the predicative adjective *dyr-t* ‘expensive-N’ occurs in its neuter form – indicated by the suffix *-t* – and it agrees with the neuter gender noun *hus* ‘house’, while in (14a) *dyr* ‘expensive’ modifies the common gender noun *pibe* ‘pipe’ and, thus, appears in its common gender form without a *-t* suffix.<sup>15</sup> The gender distinction also emerges in the contrast between the doubling pronouns *det* (it.N) and *den* (it.C). The contrast between common and neuter gender only applies in the singular, cf. the non-variation with respect to the predicative adjective *dyr-e* and the doubling pronoun *de* between the plural forms of (14ab) to the right of the double slash.

Apart from this system of grammatical gender, Danish, again together with Swedish and Norwegian, uses the split between neuter and common gender (in Norwegian Bokmål and Nynorsk neuter vs. masculine/feminine) to encode a semantic distinction between making reference to non-individuated and individuated entities, respectively (see Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 455-466). Without being specific about the many empirical implications of this distinction, the examples in (15a) illustrate that definite mass nouns, which refer to individuated entities, follow the grammatical agreement system, while the non-individuated bare mass noun-subjects in (15b) obligatorily are modified by predicative adjectives in the neuter.

(15a) Røg-en (den) er usund. // sukker-et (det) er usund-t.  
*smoke-C.DET (it.C) is unhealthy* // *sugar-N.DET (it.N) is unhealthy-N*  
 ‘The smoke (it) is unhealthy. // The sugar (it) is unhealthy.’

(15b) Røg/sukker (det) er usund-t.  
*smoke/sugar (it.N) is unhealthy-N*  
 ‘Smoke/sugar (it) is unhealthy.’

These observations are consistent with the fact that also event nominalisations (in the sense of Grimshaw 1992) and complement clauses in subject position, cf. (16ab), trigger mandatory neuter agreement in the predicative adjective, although *piberygning* ‘pipe smoking’ is common gender and clauses are unmarked for gender.

<sup>14</sup> The pronouns *den/det* can be realised either as a stressed strong form (corresponding to English *that*) or an unstressed weak form (corresponding to English *it*). The latter is used consistently throughout the glossing.

<sup>15</sup> Note that the definite article tagged onto the end of the noun, is *-(e)n* with common nouns in the singular, cf. *violin-en* (violin-DET/the violin), and *-(e)t* with neuter nouns in the singular, cf. *hus-et* (house-DET/the house) (see also footnote 6).



- (16a) Piberygning (det) er usund-t.  
*pipe.smoking (it.N) is unhealthy-N*  
 ‘Pipe smoking is unhealthy.’
- (16b) At Ole spiller violin, (det) er dejlig-t.  
*that Ole plays violin (it.N) is wonderful-N*  
 ‘That Ole plays the violin is wonderful.’

Bare mass nouns, event nominalisations and clauses have in common that they refer to homogeneous entities (see also the introductory section), i.e. items or phenomena that lack spatial boundaries and are consequently non-countable. The assumption that these types of nominal constituents do not carry any number feature is further corroborated by the insight that their coordination does not trigger plural agreement (see also Josefsson 2006: 1349-1355, 2013: 3). Consider the contrast between (17a) and (17bcd).

- (17a) Pibe-n og hus-et (de) er dyr-e.  
*pipe-C.DET and house-N-DET (they) are expensive-PL*  
 ‘The violin and the house (they) are expensive.’
- (17b) Sukker og røg (det) er usund-t  
*sugar and smoke (it.N) is unhealthy-N*  
 ‘Sugar and smoke (they) are unhealthy.’
- (17c) Piberygning og øldrikning (det) er farlig-t.  
*pipe.smoking and beer.drinking (it.N) is dangerous-N*  
 ‘Pipe smoking and beer drinking (they) are dangerous.’
- (17d) At Ole spiller violin, og at Pia synger, (det) er dejlig-t.  
*that Ole plays violin and that Pia sings (it.N) is wonderful-N*  
 ‘It’s great that Ole plays the violin and that Pia sings.’

The coordination of individuated nominals in (17a) is matched by plural agreement both in the doubling pronoun *de* ‘they’ and the predicative adjective *dyr-e* ‘expensive-PL’, while the coordinated, non-individuated nominals in (17bcd) systematically trigger the use of the neuter gender pronoun *det* ‘it.N’ and the neuter *-t* form of the predicative adjectives.

With respect to the pronominal reference system, the Danish data outlined above fit well with Josefsson’s (2012: 134-135) analysis of the opposition between syntactic (*den* ‘it.C’) and referential pronouns (*det* ‘it.N’) in Swedish. She argues convincingly that due to its singular number feature, *den* ‘it.C’ contributes to a bounded reading of the referent, while *det* ‘it.N’ lacks a number feature and, hence, makes reference to all kinds of arguments devoid of boundaries, such as substances, events and propositions (see also Müller 2017: 44).

### 3.2. Mass vs. event interpretation

Bare mass nouns in subject position either refer directly to first-order ontological entities, i.e. *liquids* (blood, vodka), *powders* (sugar, flavour), *gases* (smoke, damp), and *substances* (metal, wood), or ‘covertly’ to third-order ontological entities, i.e. events (actions, processes, states) which take place in the world, be it real or fictional (following the classification of entity types presented in Lyons 1977: 442-447). The specific interpretation as to whether they refer to one or the other entity type depends on whether they are followed by I(individual)-level predicates, which ascribe stable, and

often inherent, properties to their argument, or S(tage)-level predicates, which can be viewed as expressing temporary, episodic properties of the individuals they are attributed to, cf. (18) (see e.g. Carlson 1977 for the distinction between I- and S-level predicates).

- (18) *Vodka er gennemsigtig-t/ dejlig-t.*  
*vodka is transparent-N/ wonderful-N*  
 ‘Vodka is transparent/ wonderful.’

The property of being transparent is a permanent quality which, other things being equal, holds for the first-order subject referent *vodka* ‘vodka’ in any situation, while being wonderful, rather than a stable and objective feature, is likely to be interpreted as a value judgment attributed to situations where vodka is consumed. Justification for this assumption is provided by the evidence put forward in (19), where the VP-adverbial *om morgenen* ‘in the morning’ added to the left of the finite verb triggers an event interpretation of the subject (paraphrasable as ‘drinking vodka in the morning’) which is compatible with S-level predicates, but incompatible with I-level predicates.

- (19) *Vodka om morgen-en er dejlig-t/ \*gennemsigtig-t.*  
*vodka in morning-DET is wonderful-N/ transparent-N*  
 ‘Drinking vodka in the morning is wonderful (\*transparent).’

Similarly, we can see in (20) that only the event reading fits into constructions with the expletive *det* ‘it’ and a PP introduced by the preposition *med* ‘with’, (see Josefsson 2009: 58-63 for a more detailed account of this kind of construction), which is parallel in meaning to what (19) expresses.

- (20) *Det er dejlig-t/ \*gennemsigtig-t med vodka om morgen-en.*  
*it is wonderful-N/ transparent-N with vodka in mornings*  
 ‘It is wonderful (\*transparent) to drink vodka in the morning.’

In contrast to mass nouns in subject position, BSCN-subjects can only induce third-order entity event interpretations, not interpretations as first-order entities. Moreover, BSCN-subjects do not allow modification by I-level predicates, cf. (21), and they generally license the possibility of introducing VP-adverbials before the finite verb, cf. (22).

- (21) *\*Pibe er ofte træfarvet. // \*Violin er et strengeinstrument.*  
*pipe is often wood-coloured // violin is a stringed.instrument*

- (22) *Pibe om morgen-en er usund-t. // Violin om morgen-en er ubehagelig-t.*  
*pipe in morning-DET is unhealthy-N // violin in morning-DET is unpleasant-N*  
 ‘To smoke (a) pipe in the morning is unhealthy. // To listen to/play (the) violin in the morning is unpleasant.’

Since Danish is a strict V2 language (see introduction), the possibility of adding VP-adverbials to the left of the finite verb in cases such as (22) provides a very compelling argument in favour of analysing subject-BSCNs as stimulating event interpretations. Standardly in Danish, VP-adverbials (or any other constituents for that matter) cannot occur in pre-verbal position in SV word order sequences, because, owing to the V2 principle, the subject, must occur in post-verbal position in order for the sentence to be correct. Consequently, the following sentence results in a V2 violation, as two constituents, both the subject *violinen* ‘the violin’ and the VP-adverbial *i går* ‘yesterday’, appear

before the finite verb.<sup>16</sup>

- (23) \*Violin-en i går fald-t ud af kasse-n.  
*violin-DET yesterday fall-PST out of box-DET*

From this we can deduce that the VP-adverbial *om morgenen* ‘in the morning’ in (22) cannot modify the finite copular sentence verb *er* ‘is’, but instead – precisely because it is a VP-adverbial, which by definition modifies the predicative part of the clause (Jackendoff 1972) – must modify a covert predicate which takes the BSCN as its direct object/internal argument.

In this way, and in accordance with the basic assumption proposed in the introduction, a further central argument has been provided for claiming that the subject-BSCNs under investigation should be analysed as embedded under a larger structure with the status of a predicate.

### 3.3. Genericity

Intuitively, it would seem that the expressions with BSCNs in subject position treated so far have a generic flavour. This is surely so, first, because the BSCN-subjects clearly do not refer to specific individuals or objects, but rather designate kinds of entities and, second, because the sentences as such do not report on specific episodes; instead they express some kind of regularity or general rule. However, (24ab) show that the occurrence of BSCNs as generic subjects turns out to be restricted as compared with that of indefinite NPs, definite NPs and BPs (including mass terms) (see also Borthen, 2003: 204-208 about genericity and BSCNs in Norwegian, which has informed and inspired this analysis).

- (24a) En bil/bil-en/bil-er er (et) køretøj(er) // har fire hjul.  
*a car/car-DET/car-PL be (a) vehicle(s) // has/have four wheels*  
 ‘A car/the car/cars is/are (a) vehicle(s) // has/have four wheels.’
- (24b) \***Bil** er et køretøj. // \***Bil** har fire hjul.  
*car is a vehicle // car has four wheels*

According to Krifka et al. (1995: 2-3, 16-18), so-called characterising (or generic) sentences, defined as propositions which, instead of reporting on specific episodes or facts, express general properties by summarising particular episodes or facts, fall into two major classes: 1) habitual characterising sentences, and 2) lexical characterising sentences. The former typically include episodic verbal predicates and thus generalise about patterns of events, as in *landmænd ryger ofte pibe* ‘farmers often smoke (a) pipe’, while the latter contain stative verbal predicates, i.e. predicates which are not related to episodes, which instead make generalisations about characterising properties of individuals (objects), as in *biler er køretøjer* ‘cars are vehicles’ or *biler har som regel fire hjul* ‘cars usually have four wheels’.

The examples in (24b) show that BSCNs cannot be subjects of lexical characterising sentences. Following the basic assumptions outlined in the previous section, a plausible explanation for this constraint is that since subject-BSCNs refer to events rather than individuals, they are incompatible with predicates that generalise about properties of individuals. In other words, they cannot form part of lexical characterising sentences because they make reference to the ‘wrong’ entity type, so to speak. This insight is further corroborated by the following two examples.

<sup>16</sup> I disregard the reading of (23) where the PP *i går* ‘yesterday’ forms part of the NP-constituent as a postmodifier. In this case, *violinen i går* ‘the violin yesterday’ would mean something like ‘the violin we saw/were concerned with yesterday’.

- (25) \***Bil** kører hurtig-ere end mange andre køretøj-er.  
*car drives fast-COMP than many other vehicle-PL*
- (26) \***Løve** er udbredt i Afrika.  
*lion is widespread in Africa*

The first example shows that BSCN-subjects cannot fulfil the Agent-role, a limitation that does not apply to ‘regular’ generic NPs, or any other types of NP for that matter. This observation can be seen as supporting the assumption that BSCN-subjects are non-argumental, i.e. they behave syntactically as property-denoting modifiers (see also the description in the following section) and, as such, they cannot be assigned semantic argument roles in the way that DPs can. Moreover, as indicated previously, subject-BSCNs are in object position of an unrealised predicate and thus modify this V with semantic content corresponding to the Theme argument, not the Agent argument.

The second example shows that BSCNs do not refer to kinds of individuals, as they cannot be the subjects of kind-level predicates (see also Borthen 2003: 196 for Norwegian). Once again, it seems reasonable to interpret this restriction as a consequence of the assumption that subject-BSCNs do not denote in the domain of individuals, i.e. they are not expressions of semantic type <e>, but denote properties and are thus of semantic type <e,t>.

The distinction between habitual and lexical characterising sentences can also shed light on the empirical fact (see previous examples) that the occurrence of BSCNs in subject position is not limited to copular constructions with non-agreeing predicative adjectives (see e.g. (13ab), here repeated as (27a) and (28a)).

- (27a) (at ryge) **Pibe** smager mig absolut bedst, når jeg er alene.  
*(to smoke) pipe tastes me absolutely best when I am alone*  
 ‘I absolutely enjoy pipe smoking most when I am on my own.’
- (27b) \***Pibe** har en stor brændflade.  
*pipe has a large burning.surface*
- (28a) Ja, **køkkenhave** kræver arbejde (at anlægge/vedligeholde), men (...)  
*yes kitchen.garden demands work (to plant/maintain) but (...)*  
 ‘Yes it’s true, planting/maintaining a kitchen garden requires a lot of work, but (...)’
- (28b) \***Køkkenhave** kan bestå af højbed-e.  
*kitchen.garden can consist of raised.bed-PL*

The non-copular structures in (27a) and (28a) license BSCNs in subject position because, as habitual characterising sentences, they contain the episodic verbal predicates *smage* ‘taste’ and *kræve* ‘require’, which here generalise about instances of the events of pipe-smoking and kitchen garden planting/maintenance, respectively. In both cases, the eventive reading is compatible with the possibility of inserting an infinitival predicate form (indicated in parentheses) – either before the BSCN-subject as in (27a), or after the predicate as in (28a) – which makes semantically explicit what kind of main event the BSCN modifies. Adding the infinitive *at ryge* ‘to smoke’ in (27a) signals overtly that it is the event of pipe-smoking which is subject to generalisation. Moreover, the possibility of stating the predicate explicitly also implies that (27a) cannot be understood as generalising about instances of the subject-BSCN referent (understood as some kind of mass) involved directly in the activity of tasting. Following the insights obtained previously concerning genericity and the agentivity status of the subject, it is also important to note that precisely the matrix

clause verbs in (27a) and (28a) subcategorise for events and, hence, accept non-agentive NPs in subject position.

The contrasting examples of (27b) and (28b) show that lexical characterising sentences, whose main predicates are morphologically unrelated to episodic verbs (see Krifka et al. 1995), such as is the case with *have* ‘have’ and *bestå* ‘consist’ in the examples, do not accept BSCNs in subject position (see also the examples in (24b)). The reason for this is, naturally, that instead of generalising over events, they express regularities that hold for the kind of referents denoted by the subject-NPs, i.e. they report on the properties of the subject referents, not on events in which they may be involved. Therefore, these sentences are also not compatible with infinitival predicates similar to the ones in (27a) and (28a), which prompt an eventive reading on the subject.

From this discussion we can conclude that BSCN-subjects can occur outside the domain of copula sentences provided that the expression is a habitual characterising sentence whose matrix verb subcategorises for subjects which induce eventive (by definition non-agentive) interpretations. Consequently, there are no differences in terms of the conditions under which BSCNs occur in copula and non-copular sentences, apart from the fact that in the former the event status of the BSCN-subject is often directly prompted by non-agreeing predicative adjectives.

The generalisations about subject-BSCNs presented in this section concerning genericity can then be represented formally in the following way for a model example like *pibe om morgenen er usundt* ‘pipe-smoking in the morning is unhealthy’, where ‘ $\forall_{\text{Gen}}$ ’ is a quasi-universal quantifier that allows exceptions:

$$(29) \quad \forall_{\text{Gen}}(e)[\text{pipe\_smoking}(e) \wedge \text{in\_the\_morning}(e) \rightarrow \text{is\_unhealthy}(e)]$$

The representation above approximately translates into ‘in most cases, every pipe-smoking event that takes place in the morning is unhealthy’, where, for simplicity, the three complex expressions are treated as simple, unanalysed 1-place predicates. In the following section, a detailed proposal for the representation of the subject-BSCN predicate (the pipe-smoking event) will be introduced.

#### 4. Analysis of a hidden clausal structure

The analysis that has been suggested so far is that the BSCN-subject is an object of an unrealised predicate and that it is this VP that constitutes the sentence subject - not the BSCN in itself. This analysis, which implies as a general requirement that the matrix clause predicate is able to subcategorise for a clausal structure, can be illustrated in a non-technical manner as follows.

$$(30) \quad \begin{array}{c} \sqrt{\quad \text{Event} \quad \quad \quad} \\ \text{[(At ryge) pibe] er usund-t.} \\ \text{└─ O ─┘} \end{array} \quad \text{‘To smoke (a) pipe is unhealthy.’}$$

In (30), the arrow below the text indicates that *pibe* ‘pipe’ is the object (O) of an unrealised predicate *at ryge* ‘to smoke’, and the arrow above the text shows that the neuter inflectional ending -*t* of the predicative adjective *usund-t* ‘unhealthy-N’ in the present context (see the analysis presented in the previous section) automatically prompts an event reading of the sentence subject. The parentheses enclosing *at ryge* ‘to smoke’ specify that this predicate is unrealised in the syntactic structure and the square brackets that it is the larger structure in which the object is embedded which functions as the subject of the copula construction.

This initial suggestion of an analysis raises the important question of what are the requirements and restrictions with respect to the nature of the unrealised predicate and its relation to the BSCN.

#### 4.1. Null-predicates and their semantics

In their analyses and discussions of so-called ‘pancake-sentences’ in the Scandinavian languages, both Enger (2004: 7-9) and Josefsson (2009: 43) reject the approach presented in early versions of generative theory (Faarlund 1977; Faarlund et al. 1997: 767) that the nominal constituent is the object of an underlying infinitive which has been deleted through syntactic transformation.<sup>17</sup> Such a transformational analysis, they rightfully claim, brings with it the obvious problem that it seems impossible to determine with any precision which specific verb has actually been deleted. In many cases, it is certainly possible to create meaningful sentences by inserting different lexical verbs, cf. the Swedish example in (31).

- (31) Att ha/få/se/möta arga hundar är obehaglig-t  
 to have/get/see/meet angry dogs is unpleasant-N  
 ‘To have/get/see/meet angry dogs is unpleasant’  
 (Josefsson 2009: 46)

This leads Josefsson (2009) to suggest that instead of an analysis based on the deletion of the infinitival form of a specific verb, it would make more sense to assume a verb with an empty phonological form, i.e. a null-predicate, whose meaning corresponds to a basic concept such as Possession or Movement, glossed as HAVE and GO, respectively. On these grounds and with reference to Butt & Lahiri’s (2004: 36) conception of *passepertout* verbs, Josefsson’s main idea is that the unrealised predicate should be conceived of as a light verb, i.e. a semantically bleached predicative element which introduces a very general relation between, in this case, a non-overt generic PRO subject and the object DP. Consequently, light verbs can be characterised as concepts with a reduced intension and a broad extension, meaning that their formal definition includes relatively few semantic features, which implies that the set of contexts to which such verbs apply is relatively large (see also Herslund 2014: 76 for a definition of specific vs. general verbs).

An approach similar to Josefsson’s conception of semantically underspecified null-predicates is adopted here, albeit with some important differences, as will be shown below.

As illustrated in the examples below, the occurrence of BSCNs in object position as both direct and prepositional objects is widespread in Danish (for an analysis of these structure as instances of pseudo-incorporation, see section 4.2).

- (32a) Bo maler **hus** // vasker **bil** // pudser **næse** hele tid-en.  
 Bo paints house // washes car // blows nose all time-DET  
 ‘Bo paints his house // washes his car // blows his nose all the time.’

<sup>17</sup> ‘Pancake sentences’ is a term used primarily in Scandinavian linguistics to cover the phenomenon that in certain sentences the predicative adjective disagrees in formal gender with its subject, because the subject DP, instead of referring to an individual, triggers an event reading (see also Wechsler 2013). Crucially, however, while analyses of ‘pancake-sentences’ traditionally treat DPs in subject position, this paper, as indicated previously, deals with subject-BSCNs that function as property-denoting modifiers, not DP-arguments. Having said that, the two analyses have in common that the nominal constituent in subject position, i.e. the DP/BSCN, is in both cases considered as being embedded in a clausal structure as an object. Apart from the Scandinavian linguistics, cases of non-agreement and covert event interpretation comparable to ‘pancake sentences’ have been studied, for instance, by Danon (2012) for Hebrew, Roy & Shlonsky (2019) for French, and Martin et al. (2020) for French and Brazilian Portuguese. Finally, attention should be drawn to the fact that the phenomenon of nominals projecting event structure extends far beyond the use of BSCNs, or DPs in ‘pancake sentences’, as it is a fundamental element in the literature on semantic compositionality, type-coercion, etc., as e.g. Generative Lexicon Theory (see e.g. Pustejovsky 1995, 2001 and references therein).

- (32b) Lise søger efter **lejlighed** // sørger for **bil** hele tid-en.  
*Lise looks for flat // arranges for car all time-DET*  
 ‘Lise looks for a flat // organises transport all the time.’

As a first hypothesis, one could assume an analogy between the structures in (32ab) and the possibility of BSCNs to occur as subjects in the sense that if a BSCN is allowed in object position of a particular V at the sentence level, the same BSCN will also be licensed in subject position with the V in question as a covert null-predicate. However, the structures in (33ab), which in terms of parentheses annotation follow (30), show us that the assumption of such a direct analogy is unwarranted both with respect to direct and prepositional objects.

- (33a) \*[(at male) hus] / \*[(at vaske) bil] / \*[(at pudse) næse] hele tid-en er usund-t.  
*to paint house / to wash car / to blow nose all time-DET is unhealthy-N*
- (33b) \*[(at søge efter) lejlighed] / \*[(at sørge for) bil] hele tid-en er besværlig-t.  
*to look for flat / to arrange for car all time-DET is difficult-N*

In the above examples, it is hard to decode how the BSCNs should be interpreted when they appear without overt predicates in contextless copular sentences. Danish native speakers unambiguously judge examples like *\*hus hele tiden er usundt* ‘house all the time is unhealthy’ and *\*lejlighed hele tiden er besværligt* ‘flat all the time is difficult’ to be ungrammatical because, presumably, there is no indication of which predicate these semantically underspecified structures should naturally be inferred from. By contrast, examples such as the authentic ones in (12ab) and (13ab) are of course acceptable because in these cases we have a clear idea of the existence of a covert predicate with a more or less specific semantic content. So, we can conclude that while it is a prerequisite for BSCNs to occur in subject position that they are licensed as objects by a null-predicate, not all BSCNs licensed as objects can occur in subject position.

On this basis, it is, therefore, proposed that the common semantico-pragmatic grounds on which all the uses of BSCN-subjects rest is that they either should be interpreted in accordance with what prototypically can be considered the primary function of the BSCN-referent (a dynamic perspective), or, alternatively, they convey a meaning which makes us infer an underlying relation of possession (a static perspective). Let us first look at the functional, dynamic perspective.

Following Generative Lexicon Theory (see e.g. Pustejovsky 1995 and later papers), the meaning of any lexical item is structured on the basis of four factors, the FORMAL, CONSTITUTIVE, TELIC and AGENTIVE qualia-roles, which provide a systematic account of how we as humans understand entities and relations in the world; see the template of the artefact-denoting noun *violin* in (34).

- (34) **Qualia-structure of X (*violin*)**  
 FORMAL = is-a-relation [X is a musical instrument]  
 CONSTITUTIVE = parts-of-relation [X consists of strings, tuning pins, fingerboard, etc.]  
 TELIC = purpose-of-relation, ‘**play-act**’ [X has the purpose of being played, making sound, etc.]  
 AGENTIVE = bringing-about-relation, ‘**make-act**’ [X is made by a violin maker, a company, etc.]

The qualia-structure specifies that *violin* is an artefact of the instrument type [FORMAL], which consists of a number of parts [CONSTITUTIVE]. Further, it indicates that *violin* includes producer and purpose relations, which are encoded by the predicates **make-act** and **play-act** in the AGENTIVE and TELIC roles, respectively. Artefact-denoting nouns by definition hold these four relations – the first two are static, and the last two dynamic – as part of their lexical meaning, while nouns denoting

natural kinds do not necessarily involve the AGENTIVE and TELIC roles.

The important point here is that it is the TELIC (purpose of) relation of the BSCN which is automatically prompted when it occurs in subject position. Therefore, the null-predicate we as readers infer from the structure is one associated with the prototypical purpose-act of the entity denoted by the subject-BSCN.

More specifically, this means, e.g. for the copular sentences in (12ab), that the interpretations prompted by the BSCN-subjects can be paraphrased as ‘smoke (the) water pipe’, ‘cultivate (the) kitchen garden in raised beds’, i.e. activity interpretations projected in accordance with the TELIC role for the nouns in question (see also Borthen 2003: 332-336).

An objection to this explanation, which might seem valid at first sight at least, could be that context-free, simple examples may be ambiguous, as they can often be paraphrased in different ways (see also Enger 2004: 7-8; Josefsson 2009: 46).

- (35) **Pibe** er ulækker-t. → At ryge // at lugte til **pibe** er ulækker-t.  
*pipe is repulsive-N* → *to smoke // to smell to pipe is repulsive-N*  
 ‘It is repulsive to smoke a pipe. //The smell of pipe is repulsive.’
- (36) **Violin** er frygtelig-t. → At spille // at lytte til **violin** er frygtelig-t.  
*violin is awful-N* → *to play // to listen to violin is awful-N*  
 ‘It is awful to play // to listen to the violin.’

The examples to the left of the arrows can be understood in at least two ways: as sentences uttered by persons who see the events from the perspective of actually performing the act of smoking or playing, or as sentences uttered by persons who see the events from the perspective of being exposed to these same acts. However, in both cases the meaning is associated with different aspects of what could be characterised as the basic purpose of the objects in question – i.e. to produce smoke and sound. Although the possibility of inferences associated with meaning relations other than TELIC cannot be excluded, we are ‘naturally’ prone to call to mind a verbal predicate that denotes an activity related to the typical function of the entity denoted by the BSCN.<sup>18</sup> It is not surprising to find this default status of the purpose reading since artefacts are always made for a purpose – the result of that being that the TELIC role is an inherent and potentially prominent feature of any artefact-denoting noun – and we conventionally associate artefacts with situations in which their function prototypically plays a decisive role. By contrast, it seems reasonable to speculate that in general we are less concerned with the origin or ‘bringing about’ of an object, as these factors normally do not influence our ‘everyday’ interaction with that object and, hence, tend not to serve as default patterns of thinking and reasoning. On these grounds, the purpose-of-relation can be considered one of the default readings of artefact-denoting BSCNs in subject position.

In several cases, examples of BSCNs in subject position can be appropriately paraphrased with both stative and dynamic predicates that clearly differ semantically from the dynamic predicates projected from the TELIC role of the BSCNs treated so far. Consider the following example, where the stative verb *have* ‘have’ and the dynamic verb *købe* ‘buy’ both seem to fit the intended meaning of the original sentence.

<sup>18</sup> Borthen (2003: 215) highlights the Norwegian example *sykkel er risikabelt* ‘(to steal a) bike is risky’ as evidence supporting the view that both the matrix clause predicate, by means of some sort of pragmatic inference, and a specific context, in this case of interlocutors discussing what to steal, can affect what kind of relation will be inferred in a process of lexical semantic co-composition between the elements. To this we might add that also the agentive role can be evoked given the appropriate context, cf. the following Danish example heard at a dinner party *tagterrasse er virkelig dyrt* ‘(to build a) roof terrace is really expensive’.



- (37) **Hus** er for dyr-t. → At have/købe **hus** er for dyr-t.  
*house is too expensive-N* → *to have/buy house is too expensive-N*  
 ‘To have/buy a house is too expensive.’

This observation matches well with the renowned cross-linguistic tendency that object-BSCNs are licensed by so-called HAVE-verbs (Borthen 2003: 164-193; see also section 2.2), i.e. predicates which carry an implication of availability between the arguments, in this case the non-overt generic PRO subject and the object-BSCN (formally the matrix sentence subject). By way of pragmatic inference, this availability implication often results in interpretations of a possessive nature (see e.g. Müller 2017: 47).

Moreover, in her definition of HAVE-verbs Borthen (2003: 164-167) explains that Norwegian verbs like *ha* ‘have’, *ønske seg* ‘want (REFL)’, *treng* ‘need’, *mangle* ‘lack’, *finne (seg)* ‘find (REFL)’, *motta* ‘receive’, *låne (seg)* ‘borrow (REFL)’, *kjøpe (seg)* ‘buy (REFL)’, etc. have in common ‘that they all can be decomposed into a semantic structure that includes a *have-relation* (at least on some readings), or, in other terms, *introduce* a have-relation’. Thus, within this broad definition of HAVE-verbs, it becomes apparent that a verb of achievement like *købe* ‘buy’ allows object BSCNs because it implies availability of something as the result of a buying process, cf. (37).

However, as is evident from the unlikelihood of accepting *købe* ‘buy’ in (38) below as a candidate for fulfilling the role of covert predicate, it is not sufficient that the verb in question introduces a have-relation. In order to license BSCNs, the have-relation as an additional requirement must be *profiled* (Borthen 2003: 168-169), which means that the relevant context, rather than focussing on how the verbal activity or action is carried out, must profile the final state of possession.

- (38) **Bil** er behagelig-t. → At have/køre i/\*købe **bil** er behagelig-t.  
*car is pleasant-N* → *to have/drive in/buy car is pleasant-N*  
 ‘To have/drive/(*\*buy*) a car is pleasant.’

(37) contrasts with (38) in this respect, in the sense that while the predicative adjective *dyr-t* ‘expensive-N’ in (37) allows us to draw attention to the result of the buying process, the state of possession, the predicative adjective *behagelig-t* ‘pleasant-N’ tends to encourage a reading which profiles the event of buying as a manner of achievement, i.e. the emphasis is on the succession of pragmatically determined buying stages prior to the actual taking possession. Therefore, the HAVE-verb *købe* ‘buy’ is acceptable as covert predicate in (37), but not in (38). In (38), the context does not naturally lead to a profiling of the have-relation of *købe* ‘buy’ and, consequently, it is not likely to make us infer that the verbal event of buying ‘underlies’ the BSCN-subject.

On this basis, we can conclude that depending on the context – which in these simple copula examples essentially is tantamount to the semantics of the predicative adjective – either the inference of a null-predicate takes place in accordance with the TELIC (purpose of) relation of the BSCN-subject or the BSCN-subject suggests projection of a null-predicate which expresses a static or dynamic have-relation. Furthermore, it is important to realise that the inducement of null-predicates in specific examples is also subject to general rules of pragmatic inference. For instance, we are probably conventionally prone to think and talk about a house as something we acquire and own, whereas a pipe is more likely to evoke patterns of thought associated with its function. Therefore, apart from the influence exerted by the BSCN’s lexical specification and the context, obviously the semantics of the induced predicate also depends on whether it makes more sense pragmatically to interpret the expression in question from a telic or a possessive perspective.

#### 4.2. BSCNs as property-denoting event modifiers

In this section, it is suggested that the relation between the unrealised predicate and the BSCN can be

accounted for by being analysed as pseudo-incorporation (PI). Following e.g. Dayal (2011, 2015), Borik & Gehrke (eds.) (2015), Müller (2017), among several others, PI of complements in object position can be defined as the process by which an NP – in this case a noun without elements expressing nominal functional categories, such as case, articles, quantifiers, demonstratives or possessors (Massam 2009) – gives up its status as bona fide, independent object argument and shifts to a modifier which is pseudo-incorporated into V to form a complex unit or predicate (see e.g. Farkas & de Swart 2003; Dayal 2011, 2015).<sup>19</sup>

According to Borik & Gehrke (2015), the PI approach to the study of object-BSCN structures has been used in a number of languages (for a non-exhaustive list, see Borik & Gehrke 2015: 11, note 5). Despite language-specific differences, typically related to the degree of bareness and the position of the NP, the following morphosyntactic and semantic properties seem to be central to this construction type across languages: 1) narrow scope, 2) word order restrictions, 3) prosody and 4) modificational restrictions. In the following, these factors will be discussed in an eclectic manner, meaning that the analysis concentrates exclusively on the data considered immediately relevant to the occurrence of subject-BSCNs in Danish.<sup>20</sup>

BSs differ from singular indefinites in terms of scopal behaviour in the sense that the former only allow narrow scope interpretation, whereas the latter are ambiguous with respect to narrow vs. wide scope interpretation (see e.g. also Carlson 1977a, b for English, Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003 for examples from Spanish, Italian and Romanian, and Dayal 2011 for Hindi).

- (39) Han regner med at købe **hus/et hus** om et år.  
*he counts on to buy house/a house in a year*  
 ‘He expects to buy a house in a year.’

The singular indefinite *et hus* ‘a house’ in (39) can either be interpreted as referring to a specific house the subject referent considers buying, i.e. the nominal takes wide scope with respect to the predicate, or as any non-specific house which may be to the potential buyer’s liking, in which case the nominal is within the (narrow) scope of the predicate. By contrast, the parallel BSCN *hus* ‘house’ can only make reference to a non-specific house, i.e. here only the narrow scope reading is possible. Standardly, this interpretive restriction on object-BSCNs is seen as a cross-linguistic stable indication that a tighter bond between V and BSCN is established than is the case in normal complementation structures (see e.g. Borik & Gehrke 2015; Dayal 2011, 2015, and references therein). Put briefly, in narrow scope structures the nominal stays under the scope of the predicate so that expressions of negation, modality and quantification operate on the full V+BSCN, not separately on one or another of the elements (see also Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006).

Closely related to these observations concerning scope relations is the fact that the occurrence of object-BSCNs – in opposition to fully-fledged arguments – is confined to the post-verbal position under normal conditions of intonation and prosody, see (40).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Importantly, PI differs from the phenomenon of ‘real’ morphosyntactic incorporation, which we find in verbal compounds with the structure [NV]<sub>V</sub> or [VN]<sub>V</sub>, i.e. expressions created through morphosyntactic absorption of the N-component by the V-component (see e.g. Booij 2009: 5). In PI, the BSCNs permit certain kinds of modification (see e.g. Borik & Gehrke 2015; Müller 2017), as well as possible non-contiguosness of the V-N/N-V structure, while in morphosyntactic incorporation, the incorporated noun must belong to the category of N<sup>0</sup>, i.e. a completely unmodified noun (see Baker 1988; Baker et al. 2005).

<sup>20</sup> For a comprehensive study of Danish BSCNs in object position and their PI under V, see Müller (2017).

<sup>21</sup> In Danish, object fronting of BSCNs is licensed in contrastive contexts, cf. e.g. *Bo ryger pibe, men VIOLIN spiller han ikke* ‘Bo smokes (a) pipe, but (the) VIOLIN he does not play’ (see also Müller 2017: 67, note 11). Fronting of the object obligatorily triggers subject-verb inversion.

(40a) Bo køber **hus/hus-et** næste år.  
*Bo buys house/house-DET next year*  
 ‘Bo is going to buy a house/the house next year.’

(40b) \***Hus** køber Bo næste år. // **Hus-et** køber Bo næste år.  
*house buys Bo next year // house-DET buys Bo next year*

Moreover, left-dislocation of BSCNs is only warranted in cases where the nominal – irrespective of its formal gender – is followed by the neuter pronoun *det* ‘it’, whereas DPs are obligatorily doubled by gender-agreeing pronouns (see also section 3.1). Compare the examples in (41) containing the common gender BSCN *villa* ‘villa’.

(41) **Villa** *det* (\*den) køber Bo næste år. // **Villa-en** *den* (\*det) køber Bo næste år.  
*villa it.N it.C buys Bo next year // villa-DET it.C it.N buys Bo next year*  
 ‘Bo is going to buy a villa/the villa next year.’

Finally, the following examples show that object-BSCNs also do not permit detachment from their natural post-verbal position when exposed to focalisation in cleft sentence or passivisation operations.

(42) \*Det er **hus** Bo køber næste år. // \***Hus** bliver købt af Bo næste år.  
*It is house Bo buys next year // house is buy-PCPT by Bo next year*

In Danish, prosodic patterns and syntactic structure are interrelated in the sense that bareness of the object-noun triggers prosodic reduction of V, which leads to the phenomenon termed ‘unit accentuation’ between V and BSCN, while non-bareness results in full stress on the V (see Jespersen 1934; Diderichsen 1946; Rischel 1983; Hansen & Lund 1983; Nedergaard Thomsen 1991; Scheuer 1995; Petersen 2010, 2011, 2012; Hansen & Heltoft 2011), see (43).<sup>22</sup>

(43) Bo <sub>0</sub>køber <sup>1</sup>**hus** næste år. // Bo <sub>0</sub>køber <sup>1</sup>**hus-et** næste år.  
*Bo buys house next year. // Bo buys house-DET next year*  
 ‘Bo buys (a) house next year. // Bo buys the house next year.’

Importantly, unit accentuation is closely connected to the rigidity of the word order of V+BSCN structures mentioned before, meaning that the post-verbal position of the BSCN is a precondition for the verbal stress reduction and, hence, unit accentuation of V and BSCN (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: 338).

Apart from a few exceptions concerning mainly the adjective *ny* ‘new’, object-BSCNs do not allow modification by qualitative adjectives or relative clauses, see (44).<sup>23</sup>

(44) Bo køber (\*moderne) **hus**, (\*der ligger i København).  
*Bo buys modern house which is in Copenhagen*

<sup>22</sup> The subscript ‘<sub>0</sub>’ indicates weak stress, while the superscript ‘<sup>1</sup>’ designates main word stress.

<sup>23</sup> In their article on bare nouns and incorporating verbs in Spanish and Catalan, Espinal & McNally (2011: 99) indicate that BSCNs in object position allow modification by relational adjectives or PP-complements if the expressions denote kinds of entities. A similar pattern seems to hold for Danish in the sense that expressions such as *han bærer høj hat* ‘he wears (a) top hat [lit.: high hat]’ and *han bygger sommerhus* ‘he builds (a) summer house’ are fully acceptable, because the adjectively modified BSCN *høj hat* ‘top hat’ and the compound BSCN *sommerhus* ‘summer house’ denote subtypes of hats and houses, respectively.

In the same vein, it can be noted that, as opposed to object-DPs, object-BSCNs cannot form a secondary predication with an adjective, i.e. function as subjects of predicative adjectives in what are termed ‘resultative small clauses’ (as defined by, e.g., Hoekstra 1988; Doetjes 1997), see (45).

- (45) Bo maler hus-et rød-t / \*hus rød-t.  
*Bo paints house-DET red-N / house red-N*  
 ‘Bo paints the house red.’

The facts concerning scope relations, word-order, prosody and modification – seen as both isolated and interdependent phenomena – strongly suggest that instead of acting independently in syntax as free arguments, BSCNs are relatively inaccessible to the external syntax and ‘locked’ in their post-verbal position, forming in this way a tightly linked unit with the verb. Moreover, notably the constraints on modification and secondary predication formation and the triggering of pronominal non-agreement with BSCN-antecedents in left dislocation structures, indicate that BSCNs in object position are not subject to individuation, i.e. they do not seem to denote identifiable individuals, but rather act as property-denoting nominals that modify the verb. More specifically, given the fact that the function of attributive adjectives is to ascribe characteristics to individuals, i.e. to modify nouns or pronouns, the general lack of possibility of adjectival modification of object-BSCNs, exemplified in (44) and (45), is a strong indication that these nominals do not denote individuals but properties. In other words, the object-BSCNs act as modifiers themselves and, thus, reject modification by other modifiers.

Consequently, following e.g. Dayal’s (2011, 2015) definition of PI in Hindi (see also previous references to PI analyses in this section), which exactly predicts that object-BSCNs incorporate into V as property-denoting modifiers that restrict the scope of V to a subtype of V’s denotation, the observations presented here provide evidence for regarding Danish V+BSCN structures as a case of PI. Empirically, this implies that V+BSCN structures such as *ryge pibe* ‘smoke (the) pipe’, *købe hus* ‘buy (a) house’ and *spille violin* ‘play (the) violin’ actually denote subtypes of events, here specifically paraphraseable as sub-activities of pipe-smoking, house-buying and violin-playing.

According to Dayal (2011: 146), PI structures of the type relevant here can be represented in formal semantic terms as  $\lambda P \lambda y \lambda e [P-V(e) \wedge \text{Agent}(e) = y]$ . In comparison with the representation of regular transitive structures of complementation, the placeholder P replaces the internal Theme argument and functions as a property-denoting predicate modifier restricting the denotation of V (see also Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006).

However, Dayal’s formal representation of PI obviously does not take into consideration the previously presented assumption that it is the TELIC (purpose of) relation or the have-relation of the BSCN which by default is activated when the BSCN surfaces in subject position. As a result, the inferred null-predicate and its object BSCN must refer to types of event which either involve the TELIC quale or the ‘availability aspect’ of the concept associated with the BSCN. In order to account for these constraints, Dayal’s PI formula needs to be expanded for Danish by a ‘purpose-of-relation’ and a ‘have-relation’ in the following way:

- (46)  $\lambda P \lambda y \lambda e [P-V(e) \wedge (\text{Agent}(e) \vee \text{Experiencer}(e)) = y \wedge (\text{Purpose-of-relation}(e) \vee \text{Have-relation}(e))]$

In this manner it is made explicit that the object position is occupied by a property-denoting nominal which modifies the V so that the PI sequence denotes a subtype of the event denoted by the V determined semantically by the TELIC quale of the nominal, or the extent to which it is likely that the context indicates a relation of availability. The fact that the external arguments inevitably are non-overt generic PRO subjects is disregarded in this formal representation, as it is not considered

immediately relevant to the focus of the analyses discussed in this paper.

If the analysis presented above is accurate, one would expect the V+BSCN structure not to be confined to the subject position, but that other argumental positions should also be available for BSCNs projecting this type of generic event. The following examples show that this is indeed the case (see also Borthen 2003: 212 for Norwegian).

(47) Rejsebureau-et foreslår **bus**.  
*travel.agency-DET proposes bus*  
 ‘The travel agency suggests taking the bus.’

(48) Det gør **bil** alt for dyr-t.  
*it makes car all too expensive-N*  
 ‘It makes it far too expensive to use the car.’

In (47) the BSCN *bus* ‘bus’ appears in object position, and in (48) the common gender BSCN *bil* ‘car’ is the object of a causative construction where the predicate adjective *dyr-t* ‘expensive-N’ shows neuter agreement. In both examples the translations into English indicate the implicit understanding of a covert predicate in order for the sentences to make sense.

With respect to (47), a spontaneous objection to the event structure projection analysis might be that the BSCN could just as well be analysed as incorporating directly under the main verb, i.e. without the ‘interference’ of a covert predicate. However, such an approach can easily be discarded as an alternative because the two types of structures show different syntactic transformation patterns, cf. (49) and (50).

(49) Han foreslår **bus**. // **Bus** bliver foreslå-et. // **Bus**, det bliver foreslå-et.  
*he proposes bus // bus is propose-PCPT // bus it.N is propose-PCPT*  
 ‘He suggests taking the bus. // To take the bus is suggested.’

(50) Ole maler **hus**. // \***Hus** bliver male-t. // \***Hus**, det bliver male-t.  
*Ole paints house // house is paint-PCPT // house it is paint-PCPT*  
 ‘Ole is painting the house.’

While BSCNs cannot appear as subjects of the passive in incorporation structures such as (50) (cf. also (42)) – either with or without realisation of the neuter pronoun *det* ‘it.N’ – this is totally unproblematic for BSCNs embedded in a covert predicate, as in (49). This is an inevitable consequence of the fact that the BSCNs in (50) are tightly linked to the V as incorporated modificational elements and, thus, are reluctant to accept detachment from their ‘natural’ post-verbal position (see Müller 2017: 50), whereas the BSCNs in (49) together with their covert predicate are free clausal elements that can act independently of the V, just as any other DP. Moreover, in aspectual terms PI-structures such as *male hus* ‘paint (the) house’ predominantly denote activities, while an event like ‘to suggest taking the bus’ clearly constitutes an achievement (following Vendler’s 1967 event model). So, also according to this parameter the two types of structures noticeably differ from each other.

Although this paper has concentrated on BSCNs in subject position, we can conclude that the phenomenon of embedding BSCNs under covert Vs extends beyond the subject position. This is to be expected precisely because the V+BSCN structure forms an independent clausal element which functions similarly to other event-denoting DP-nominals.

## 5. Conclusive remarks and brief discussion

The distributional analysis opening this paper shows that while BPs and mass nouns occur unconstrained in subject position of both existential and categorical sentences – leading to either generic or episodic readings of the bare nouns – BSCNs are licensed only within a limited semantic (possessive) domain in existential statements, and are practically banned from appearing in categorical statements, except for a few sporadic examples where the BSCNs have either generic or specific reference.

However, contrary to what seems to be the prevailing opinion in the Danish linguistic literature, it appears from empirical evidence that under certain conditions BSCNs are systematically allowed in subject position of both copular and non-copular categorical sentences. On the basis of an analysis of the agreement features exhibited by predicative adjectives, it is shown that BSCNs have in common with bare mass nouns, event nominalisations and clauses that as subjects they obligatorily trigger neuter agreement with the predicative adjective by which they are modified, irrespective of the grammatical gender of the bare subject-nouns. From this we can deduce that BSCNs in subject position denote in the domain of entities with homogeneous reference, i.e. they point to items/phenomena with no spatial boundaries. However, in contrast to mass nouns in subject position, which denote first-order entities, BSCN-subjects are shown to denote events (third-order entities) which leads to the assumption that they are embedded under a larger structure consisting of a covert predicate with the BSCN in object position.

In support of this covert predicate analysis, certain specific genericity conditions further corroborate that expressions with BSCNs in subject position generalise over patterns of events, as opposed to properties of individuals, both when it comes to copular and non-copular sentences. Among other factors, especially the (in)compatibility with certain matrix sentence predicates and the (im)possibility of making the covert predicate explicit in particular contexts serve as evidence supporting the claim of the BN being an eventive subject exposed to generalisation in the form of a generic statement. Consequently, it is assumed that instead of acting as arguments referring to kinds of individuals, BSCN-subjects are property-denoting modifiers which narrow down the denotation of the covert predicate under which they pseudo-incorporate.

Essential to the PI-analysis is an examination of the nature of the covert predicate and its relation to the BSCN. On the basis of Generative Lexicon Theory (e.g. Pustejovsky 1995) and Borthen's (2003) notion of 'profiled have-relations', the argumentation above suggests that the covert predicate must be interpreted as a verb which either corresponds semantically with the TELIC (purpose of) relation or the have-relation of the BSCN. In order to verify the assumption that the BSCN-subject should be interpreted as a constituent in object position without any referential implication or existential presupposition, i.e. as a modifier, the properties of obligatory narrow scope, fixed V+BSCN word order, unit accentuation and modificational restrictions were examined. They all point towards viewing the covert V+BSCN structure as an event-denoting complex semantic unit in which the BSCN pseudo-incorporates under the V and, thus, restricts its denotational scope.

Returning to the theoretical question mentioned in the introductory section of whether a nominal in the Germanic and Romance languages must be a DP to occur in argument position, cf. Longobardi (1994, 2001), it is clear that the PI-analysis suggested in this paper implies that there are compelling arguments for assuming that it is not the BSCN per se that occurs in subject position, but instead a larger structure in the form of an IP in which the BSCN is embedded. This means that, if the PI-analysis is correct, the event-structure projected from the BSCN functions on a par with other event-denoting nominals, such as complementiser phrases, infinitival phrases, gerunds and event-nominalisations, which, following Longobardi (1994, 2001) and many others, either by being headed by overt or null determiners, fully qualify as DPs and, thus, occur unconstrained in subject position. A principle objection that could be raised against the hypothesis that nominal projections must be DPs to occupy argument positions is that BSCNs, as we have seen, quite frequently occur in object

position in Danish (and other languages) (see also Müller 2017). However, here it is important to emphasise that the PI-analysis actually predicts that the BSCNs in object position cease to exist as arguments and instead convert into members of the syntactic category known as modifiers. Consequently, we can uphold the DP-hypothesis by claiming that BSCNs in these cases, from a syntactic perspective, do not have the status as arguments. Of course, such a discussion ultimately will depend on the definition of argumenthood applied and a broader look at all the possible uses of BSCNs (including the ones in predicative positions), issues that go far beyond the scope of this article.

As mentioned in the introduction, Chierchia (1998) states that in the Germanic and Romance languages bare nominals are predicates, and that in order to function as arguments they must be either DPs, BPs or mass terms. The analysis advocated here clearly rules out the possibility that the subject-BSCNs in question, through some type-shifting process, can be read as denoting in the plural domain or as compatible with non-atomic interpretations. But, again, following the PI-analysis, it is more than questionable whether the BSCN-subjects meet the requirements of occupying an argument position in the first place. Rather, it appears that the PI-analysis is consistent with Chierchia's view that in Germanic and Romance languages basically bare nominals are predicate-denoting NPs of the type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ , meaning that the relevant BSCNs are only 'surface subjects', which, being the predicates they, according to Chierchia, truly and inherently are, incorporate into a covert V and modify its denotation, i.e. they function as modifiers, not as arguments.

We can conclude that seen as an isolated phenomenon the BSCN-subjects under scrutiny in this paper do not conflict with the theoretical foundations laid out by Longobardi and Chierchia.

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