

On the Universality of RC-Islands
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Engdahl (1997) reported many naturally occurring extractions out of relative clause islands (RCIs) in Swedish, challenging the notion that strong islands such as RCIs are universal syntactic constraints (Ross 1967; Szabolsci 2006). We will put forward a novel generalization, stated in structural terms, of the environments that permit extraction in Swedish. We will discuss experimental studies that show amelioration of RCI violation in analogous English sentences and argue that there is no micro-variation in strong islandhood. We will explore two possibilities for these amelioration effects: i) amelioration is an issue of recoverability, and ii) amelioration results “interference” from the presence of UG-compatible structures which may or may not be preferred by a particular language.