Restrictions on RC Extraction

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Since Ross’s discovery of syntactic islands (Ross 1967), extraction from islands has
been the topic of intense research in both theoretical linguistics, e.g. Starke (2001);
Boeckx (2012), and psycholinguistics, e.g. Hofmeister & Sag (2010); Sprouse &
Hornstein (2013). It was early recognized that the Mainland Scandinavian lan-
guages (Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) are peculiar from a cross-linguistic per-
spective in allowing extraction from relative clauses, exemplified by Swedish in
(1). Early references include Erteschik-Shir (1973), Allwood (1975), Engdahl &
Ejerhed (1982); Taraldsen (1981), and Maling & Zaenen, (1982). Complex DPs
with a relative clause are otherwise considered strong islands (cf. The Complex
NP Constraint of Ross 1967); syntactic configurations from which movement is
never possible. In this sense, Mainland Scandinavian is peculiar whereas English
and other languages are well-behaved, cf. (2).

(1) [Såna blommor], känner jag [en man [som säljer t]],. (Swe.)
    such flowers      know I a man that sells

(2) *[Those flowers], I know [a man [who sells t]].

In this talk, we will leave theoretical interpretations of Scandinavian island viola-
tions aside and instead scrutinize the restrictions that have been claimed to hold
for these extractions, some of which have been used to formulate arguments in
analyses of these. We will show that none of these restrictions are specific to rel-
ative clause extractions. In fact some of them vanish under closer scrutiny. Given
this, any theoretical interpretation of these alleged island violations assuming the
existence of such restrictions cannot be on the right track.