

Word order changes in Danish subordinate clauses: From VX to XV and back.

This paper focuses on the rise of a significant word order change in Danish: the change from V2 to V3 (S Adv V) word order in subordinate clauses. In Modern Danish (as well as Modern Swedish and Norwegian), the sentence adverbials occur between the subject in first position and the finite verb in third position (Faarlund 1990; 2019).

Old Norse/Runic Danish (800 – 1100) (Larson 1931; Christoffersen 2002) as well as early Middle Danish before 1300 (Skautrup 1947) show almost exclusively V2 in both main clauses and subordinate clauses. However, from 1300 and onwards, both NPs, particles, and adverbials of all kinds may precede the finite verb in subordinate clauses showing a non-V2 order not restricted to V3 (henceforth XV). In (1) we see the object NP in preverbal position:

- (1) *Ther anna theth hørde aff hennes tiæneste møð* (Inf. of J. C., 1508)
when anna it heard from her maid
'When Anna heard it from her maid'

During the period of early Modern Danish (1525-1700), XV is lost again as far as NPs and valence bound adverbials are concerned, leaving only free adjuncts to precede the finite verb.

In a previous study of the rise of the Danish V3 word order, Gregersen & Pedersen (1999) track the position of only *sentences adverbials* in early and late Modern Danish texts from 1515 to 1900. This means that they miss the point that in the transition from late Middle Danish to early Modern Danish, subordinate clauses still show a plurality of constituent types in the preverbal position: NPs and adverbials of all kinds.

Along the lines of Heltoft (2003; 2019), I (1) acknowledge the occurrences of XV in subordinate clauses as an established part of the structure of the late Middle Danish language. And (2), I offer an explanation of the rise of the new XV structure that relates to the reanalysis of topological encoding of information structure, more precisely the encoding of a specific focus position which is “copied” and generalized from a postverbal to a preverbal position. I argue that the medieval XV order is the first stage of the development of the modern subordinate V3 order.

My study is based on a quantitative study of subordinate clauses in a balanced sample of 32 Middle Danish texts. Data show numerous instances of subordinate clauses with XV order (both V3, V4, and a few V5) with objects and adverbials of all kinds (and combinations of those) in the preverbal position. Furthermore, I suggest that subjectless relative clauses constitute a bridging construction since the preverbal position must be filled in by “something else” due to the V2-demand of the oldest language. In support of this claim, relative clauses are found to be the most innovative subtype of the subordinate clauses showing the new XV-structure.

This paper, thus, offers a functionally based account of the interesting development of subordinate word order in Danish: from $V_{\text{finite}}X$ in Old Norse to XV_{finite} in Middle Danish and back to $V_{\text{finite}}X$ in the modern language leaving only the free adverbials behind in a preverbal position, a significant topological feature of the modern Mainland Scandinavian languages.

References

- Christoffersen, Marit. 2002. "21. Nordic Language History and Research on Word Order." In *The Nordic Languages*, edited by Oskar Bandle, Kurt Braunmüller, Ernst Håkon Jahr, Allan Karker, Hans-Peter Naumann, and Ulf Teleman, 1:182–91. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110197051-022/html>.
- Faarlund, Jan Terje. 1990. *Syntactic Change: Toward a Theory of Historical Syntax*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- . 2019. *The Syntax of Mainland Scandinavian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gregersen, Frans, and Inge Lise Pedersen. 1999. "A La Recherche Du Word Order Not Quite Perdu." In *Textual Parametres in Older Languages*, edited by S. C. Herring, P. V. Reenen, and Lene Schøsler. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Heltoft, Lars. 2003. "Iconic and Categorical Focus Systems in Scandinavian." In *Structures of Focus and Grammatical Relations*, edited by Jorunn Hetland and Valéria Molnár. Linguistische Arbeiten 477. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.
- . 2019. "Fra Gammeldansk Til Nutidsdansk." In *Dansk Sproghistorie: Bøjning Og Bygning*, edited by Ebba Hjort, 3:129–225. København/Aarhus: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab/Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Inf. of J. C. = The Infancy of Jesus Christ [Jesu Barndomsbog], Ghemen print, ca. 1508. available on <https://tekstnet.dk/jesu-barndomsbog/metadata>
- Larson, Carl. 1931. *Ordföljdsstudier over Det Finita Verbet i de Nordiska Fornspråken*. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitetets Årsskrift.
- Skautrup, Peter. 1947. *Det Danske Sprogs Historie*. Vol. 2. 3 vols. København: Gyldendal.