

Left dislocation in main and subordinate clauses

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1. Introduction

Left dislocation is a common feature in the Nordic languages. In main clauses, a lexical noun phrase is positioned in a dislocated position in the left periphery, while a pronoun occurs in the clause-internal, prefield position, i.e., in the position preceding the finite verb. This is described by Faarlund et al (1997:904-5) for Norwegian, Teleman et al (1999 4:440–447) for Swedish and Hansen and Heltoft (2011:1828) for Danish.

(1) **Ibsen** han var ein stor dramatikar (Norwegian)

Ibsen he was a great playwright

‘Ibsen was a great playwright.’ (Faarlund et al. 1997:904)

(2) Ja **Oslo** det er en dejlig by (Danish)

yes Oslo it is a nice town

‘Yes, Oslo is a nice town.’ (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1828)

(3) **Johan,** han är bra komisk ibland. (Swedish)

Johan he is good comic sometimes

‘Johan is very comic sometimes.’ (Teleman et al 1999 4:440)

In Danish, this type of left dislocation can also occur in subordinate clauses – the “neutral sentence model”, according to Hansen and Heltoft (2011:1828). They say that the subject can be extraposed so that it occurs just after the subjunction and before the subject position. This is exemplified in (4).

(4) Ved du om **Merete** hun kommer med (Danish)

Know you whether Merete she comes with

‘Do you know whether Merete will come?’ (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1828)

Hansen and Heltoft (2011:1830) further say that pronouns cannot themselves be left dislocated, so that (5) is ungrammatical:

- (5) **De**₀ de afleverer altid til tiden (Danish)
they they deliver always to time.DEF
 ‘They always deliver on time.’ (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1830)

Teleman et al (1999 4:447) point out that this type of dislocation occurs in certain subordinate clauses, as in the authentic example from spoken language in (6). Elisabet Engdahl (p.c.), who has provided the example in (6) points out that the subordinate clause has main clause word order, with the negation following the finite verb. This seems to be necessary in this construction, since (7) is ungrammatical.

- (6) Jag har en känsla av att **ungdomarna nu för tiden** (Swedish)
I have a feeling of that youths.PL.DEF. now for time.DEF
 dom vill inte så gärna berätta om vad ...
they wil not so rather tell about what ...
 ‘I have a feeling that youths nowadays do not want to tell about what ...’ (Teleman et al 1999 4:447)

- (7) *Jag har en känsla av att **ungdomarna nu för tiden** (Swedish)
I have a feeling of that youths.PL.DEF. now for time.DEF
 dom inte vill så gärna berätta om vad ...
they not wil so rather tell about what ...
 ‘I have a feeling that youths nowadays do not want to tell about what ...’ (Elisabet Engdahl, p.c.)

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntax Database

Since it is generally acknowledged that left dislocation in main clauses exists in all the Nordic languages, this was not tested in the ScanDiaSyn survey. However, left dislocation in subordinate clauses was tested. Sentence (8) containing a sentence with left dislocation in a subordinate polarity question clause, and (9) containing a subordinate clause with a lexical noun as subject were tested in Norway and Sweden. The results are shown on maps 1 and 2.

- (8) Han ville vite om **bussen** den stopper før motorvegen (#272) (Norwegian)
he wanted know whether bus.DEF it stops before motorway.DEF
 ‘He wanted to know if the bus stops before the motor way.’

- (9) Han ville vite om **bussen** stopper før motorvegen (#1203) (Norwegian)

He wanted know whether bus.DEF stops before motorway.DEF
 ‘He wanted to know if the bus stops before the motor way.’



Map 1: Left dislocation in subordinate clauses.

(#272: *Han ville vite om bussen den stopper før motorvegen.* ‘He wanted to know if the bus stops before the motorway.’)

(black= low score)



Map 2: Lexical items in the prefield position in subordinate clauses.

(#1203: *Han ville vite om bussen stopper før motorvegen.* 'He wanted to know if the bus stops before the motorway.')

(White=high score; black = low score)

The maps show very clear results. In Norwegian and Swedish, independently of dialect, a lexical noun phrase in the subject position of the subordinate clause is fine. However, there is no place for a dislocated phrase to its left. The survey was not performed in Denmark, nor in Iceland or the Faroe Islands. I will supplement the survey with data from the Nordic Dialect Corpus.

3. Discussion

3.1. Introduction

Hansen and Heltoft (2011) give examples of left dislocation in subordinate clauses, as we saw in section 1. They say nothing, however, about the frequency of dislocated structures, or about any dialectal differences. Jørgensen (2008:2.3), however, in a web-based information site for dialectologists, says about the West Jutlandic dialects that those sentences where the constituent in the prefield is purely pronominal seem most natural. If a heavier

constituent is desired at the front, it should be put in the extraposition and be repeated pronominally.¹ Jørgensen (2000:105) takes a broader view, and says about spoken language generally that the prefield does not accept anything but pronouns, and that sentences without left dislocation (but with a lexical noun phrase) would sound artificial in informal speech. Hansen (1967) also mentions such constructions. We will take a closer look at Danish first, and then the other Nordic languages.

3.2. Data from the Nordic Dialect Corpus

3.2.1 Danish

For the topic in this paper, it is vital to be able to test natural, spoken data. The Nordic Dialect Corpus is very useful for this purpose, since it contains a lot of informal dialogue, and since it is grammatically tagged and easy to search in. Starting with Denmark, I will test constructions left dislocation as well as lexical items in the prefield in both main and subordinate clauses. I start with testing Hansen and Heltoft's (2011:1828) claim that left dislocation can occur in subordinate clauses. This is interesting because the Syntax Database reveals that this construction is rejected in Swedish and Norwegian. The corpus is morphologically tagged, but not syntactically, so I have chosen not to look for complex noun phrases, but only simple nouns. A basic search for subjunction + noun + pronoun should give us examples of the desired construction, if it exists. The results of the search show that this construction can indeed be found in Danish; there are 36 proper hits (after irrelevant hits have been removed). The hits are from all over Denmark, so there seems to be no dialectal differences here. The construction has been found in Århus, Ærø, Als, Bornholm, Falster, Fyn, Harboøre, Copenhagen, North Jutland, East Jutland, Sevel, Zealand, Spjald, Thorminde and West Jutland (the areas mentioned –Jutland and Zealand – represent individual places not further specified in the national Danish DanDiaSyn project; many of the other places in the list are also in Jutland and Zealand). In (10) I present some examples of the subordinate left dislocation.

- (10) a. Når **mor** hun var færdig med at vaske op (Danish)
when mother she was finished with to wash up
 ‘When mother had finished doing the washing up.’ (thorsminde_67)

- b. ... for at **folk** de vil handle der (Danish)
for that people they will shop there
 ‘in order that people will want to shop there.’ (fyn6)

¹ Translated by JBJ from Danish: “Sætninger virker naturligst i talesproget hvis leddet i fundamentfeltet/CPspec er rent pronominalt. Hvis man gerne vil have et tungere led forrest, skal det stå i ekstraposition og genoptages pronominalt”.

- c. ... da **Svendsen** han kom med mig (Danish)
when Svendsen he came with me
 ‘when Svendsen came with me.’ (sjaelland6)
- d. ... når **dyrlægen** han holder nede (Danish)
when veterinary.DEF he holds down
 ‘when the vet stays down.’ (aeroe1)
- e. ... fordi at **turister** de elsker jo sol og varme (Danish)
because that tourists they love yes sun and heat
 ‘because tourists of course love sun and warm weather.’ (bornholm3)
- f. ... inden **muren** den blev væltet (Danish)
before wall.DEF it was tilted
 ‘before the wall was torn down.’ (falster8)

There is definitely, then, left dislocation in subordinate clauses in Danish. There are hits from all across the country. It is also important to point out that it seems that any kind of subjunction can introduce the subordinate clause. This is surprising given that main clause word order in subordinate clauses is usually restricted to clauses introduced by *at/att* ‘that’. This is very different from the situation in some of the other Nordic languages, as we shall see below. While Hansen and Heltoft (2011) say nothing about the frequency of the left dislocation, Jørgensen (2000 and 2008) says that it would sound artificial not to have left dislocation. However, a search for subjunction + noun + verb – i.e., for subordinate clauses without left dislocation – yield 83 proper hits (as against 36 with dislocation). This means that there are more hits without than with dislocation, thus showing a result somewhat different from Jørgensen’s claims. Again, the examples are from all over Denmark: Århus, Ærø, Als, Bornholm, Falster, Fyn, København, North Jutland, East Jutland, Sevel, Zealand, Thorsminde, West Jutland. I provide two examples of subordinate clauses without left dislocation:

- (11) a. det var ikke før muren falt de fik lov til at rejse (Danish)
it was not until wall.DEF fell they got allowed to to travel
 ‘It wasn’t until the wall came down that they were allowed to travel.’ (oestjylland5)
- b. ... at konerne stod i døren og græd (Danish)
 ... *that women.DEF stood in door.DEF and cried*
 ‘...that the women stood in the door and cried.’ (sjaelland6)

Left dislocation in main clauses is well-known, as said in section 1. Searching for noun[segment start] + pronoun in the Danish part of the corpus gives 22 proper hits, from across Denmark: Århus, Ærø, Bornholm, Falster, Harboøre, North Jutland, East Jutland, Spjald and Thorsminde. Some examples are provided:

(12) a. **pigen** hun var meget syg (Danish)
girl.DEF she was very ill
 ‘The girl was very ill.’ (aarhus5)

b. **forretningerne** de lukker jo ikke (Danish)
shops.DEF they close yes not
 ‘The shops don’t close of course.’ (falster4)

There are also examples without left dislocation. Actually, the search for “Segment start” + noun + verb gives more hits: 52 proper ones. Again, they come from across Denmark, but it seems that Zealand is much better represented now, as 21 of the hits are from Zealand and Copenhagen. This could mean that there is a difference between Zealand and the rest of Denmark. More research is needed to be conclusive here. I provide two examples.

(13) a. østerbro er nok rimelig forskånet (Danish)
Østerbro is probably quite protected
 ‘Østerbro is probably quite protected.’ (kbh4)

b. storebror blev gift med min søster (Danish)
big brother became married with my sister
 ‘The older brother got married to my sister.’ (thorsminde_67)

3.2.2 The other Nordic languages: Norwegian, Swedish, Faroese and Icelandic

Left dislocation in main clauses is mentioned in the reference grammars and is attested in the Nordic Dialect Corpus, exemplified in (14).

(14) a. **Fia** hun skal jo selge Passaten sin (Norwegian)
Fia she shall yes sell Pasat.DEF her
 Fia is of course going to sell her Passat.’ (alvdal_02uk)

b. **kompisen** han ha en stuga på en holme (Swedish)
mate.DEF he had a cottage on an island
 ‘The mate had a cottage on an island.’ (arjeplog_om1)

c. **fisk** tað burdu vit snakka um (Faroese)
fish that ought we talk about
 ‘Fish, we ought to talk about.’ (klaksvik_k32)

- d. **Thailand** það er nú bara mjög ódýrt (Icelandic)
Thailand that is now only very cheap
 ‘Thailand is just very cheap.’ (Iceland_b1)

We do, however, also find left dislocation in subordinated clauses in the other Nordic languages. In these, however, unlike Danish, we only find left dislocation in *at/att* ‘that’-clauses, which are already known for allowing main clause word order in certain semantic contexts. Consider (15), which exemplifies Norwegian, Swedish and Faroese:

- (15) a. ... at **årene** de lå vrangveien (Norwegian)
 ... *that oars.DEF they lay wrong.way.DEF*
 ‘...that the oars lay the wrong way.’ (andoeya_ma_04)
- b. ... att **flickorna** de hade medhåll (Swedish)
 ... *that girls.DEF they had acceptance*
 ‘...that the girls were taken to be right.’ (jamshog_ow1)
- c. ... at **konan** hon fór at lesa (Faroese)
 ... *that wife.DEF she started to study*
 ‘...that my wife started to study.’ (klaksvik_k7)

There is no example of subordinate left dislocation in Icelandic. However, this well may be due to the very small size of the Icelandic part of the corpus (23 000 words in total, as compared to, for example, the 62 000 in the Faroese part and the 211 000 in the Danish part). One must assume, however, that there is left dislocation in Icelandic subordinate clauses. Vikner (1995) indeed suggested that Icelandic is a *general embedded V2 language*, as against the rest of the Nordic languages, called *limited embedded V2 languages*. Notice that while the Danish subordinate clauses can occur with any kind of subjunction in subordinate left dislocation, Norwegian, Swedish and Faroese only occur with the semantically neutral subjunction *at/att* ‘that’. It is exactly this subjunction that is generally accepted with the limited V2 languages, or rather, there are some (semantically defined) predicates that accompany this particular subjunction and allows embedded V2 word order (Julien 2007, [Bentzen 2014](#)). This points to a sharp difference between Danish and the other languages. Whether this difference is accompanied by other systematic differences in the embedded clause structure remains an open question.

4. Conclusion

Left dislocation is a well-known feature of the Nordic languages. However, it is only the Danish reference grammar (Heltoft and Hansen 2011) that mentions explicitly the possibility of left dislocation in embedded clauses. In Teleman et al (1999) it is, admittedly, mentioned, but only in a footnote. Jørgensen (2000) even says that sentences without left dislocation would sound artificial. Indeed, the Nordic Syntax Database shows clearly that for Swedish and Norwegian, left dislocation in subordinate clauses is not acceptable amongst the informants. Looking then at the Nordic Dialect Corpus, it is clear that left dislocation is a very frequent phenomenon in Danish, supporting the general views taken by Jørgensen (2000, 2008), although the quantitative measurements

show that utterances without left dislocation are somewhat more frequent, thus contradicting the claim about artificiality in Jørgensen (2000). There are 36 examples of embedded left dislocation (subjunction + noun + pronoun) in Danish, but also 83 examples without embedded left dislocation. Examples of embedded left dislocation in the Nordic languages Norwegian, Swedish and Faroese can be found in the dialogues in the Nordic Dialect Corpus, but only with the subjunction *at/att* ‘that’. There are no examples of Icelandic embedded left dislocation there (at the beginning of 2013).

As expected, left dislocation in main clauses is found in all the Nordic languages. There are indeed many in Danish, supporting Jørgensen’s general impression. 22 proper hits followed the general search pattern (“Segment start” + noun + pronoun), as against 52 without dislocation. Although left dislocation is also common in the other languages, the impression, without counting, is that Danish is in a league of its own.

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Web sites:

- Nordic Atlas of Language Structures (NALS) Journal: <http://tekstlab.uio.no/nals>
- Nordic Dialect Corpus: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>
- Nordic Syntax Database: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>