

The Sentence Structure of English and Danish (part II)

Unikursus 4 & 5, Engelsklærerforeningen for Gymnasiet og HF
21.01. & 25.02.2011, Aarhus Universitet

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Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen
(Goethe, Maximen und Reflexionen II, 1833)

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This hand-out is an extensively revised and expanded version of pp. 11-20 of the previous hand-out.

References

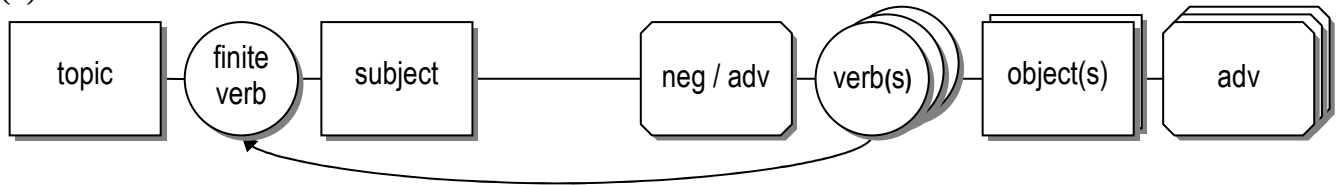
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1. A comparative field analysis of Danish and English clauses

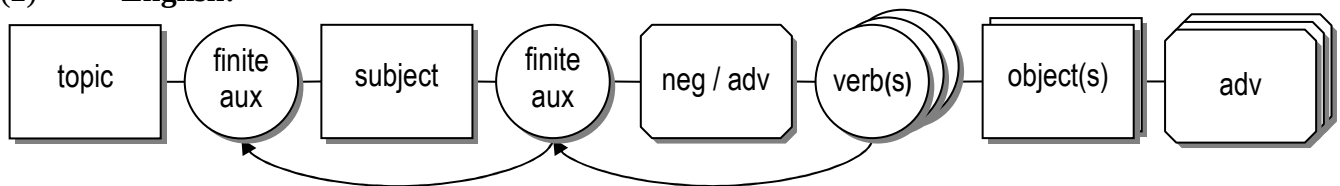
1.1 Introduction

I would like to suggest two **basic clause structures**, one for Danish and one for English:

(1) **Danish:**



(2) **English:**



The intended meaning of "basic clause structure" is that I want to be able to derive from (1) and (2) all clause types that are actually possible in the two languages.

At this point the parallels are hopefully conspicuous, even though two differences are also noticeable:

- Danish: "finite verb" - English: "finite aux"
- Danish: only one "finite verb" circle - English: two "finite aux" circles

For a list of the finite and non-finite verb forms, see Appendix A.

The **three superimposed verb-circles and adv-boxes** indicate that there can be **one or more** verbs or adverbials after one another here (in both languages, section 4.1). The **two superimposed object-boxes** indicate that there can be **one or two** objects here (in both languages, section 4.2).

A **circle** denotes a position for a **head** ("en kerne"), i.e. (at most) an individual word, whereas a **box** denotes a position for an entire **phrase** ("et syntagme").

- (3)
- | | | |
|-------------|---|---|
| a. heads: | <i>vil, spiser, spise, spist</i> | <i>will, eats, eat, eaten</i> |
| b. phrases: | <i>mange elever, tomaten, med en gaffel</i> | <i>many pupils, the tomato, with a fork</i> |

(Actually, every phrase contains a head – e.g. *with* is the head of the phrase *with a fork* – but the heads and phrases in (1) and (2) are the ones relevant for the word order differences that I want to address.)

Something else that I retain from the generative framework that I otherwise work within (, 1995, 1999a,b, 2007) is the metaphor of "**syntactic movement**", indicated by the arrows in (1) and (2). The movement is why there can only be a finite verb in **one** of the verb circles (the finite verb moves from one circle to the next). There are, however, also other types of movement than verb movement.

1.2 Danish in brief

The structure suggested for Danish in (1) is reminiscent of the very influential suggestions of Diderichsen (1946, 1964, cf. also Bjerre et al. 2008). Compare (4) with the first line in (5):

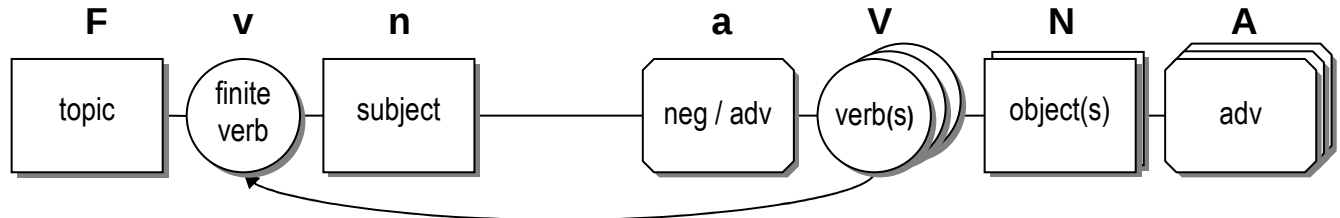
(4)

Foundation field	Nexus field			Content field		
F	v	n	a	V	N	A
Saa <i>Then</i>	har <i>has</i>	han <i>he</i>	vist <i>probably</i>	glemt <i>forgotten</i>	Galocherne <i>the galoshes</i>	her. <i>here</i>

from Diderichsen (1946:162)

(5)

Danish:



<i>Derfor</i>	<i>havde</i>	<i>han</i>		<i>ikke</i>	<i>spist</i>	<i>æblet</i>	<i>i går.</i>
a. must be filled in all main clauses (except yes/no questions).	b. must be filled in all main clauses.	c. must contain a subject (unless there is one in topic box).		e. may contain <i>ikke</i> and/ or medial sentential adverbials	f. may contain one or more verbs.	g. may contain one or two objects (or a subject predicate) (or obj. plus obj. predicate)	h. may contain one or more adverbials.
Danish ≠ English				Danish = English			

1.3 English in brief

(6)

English:

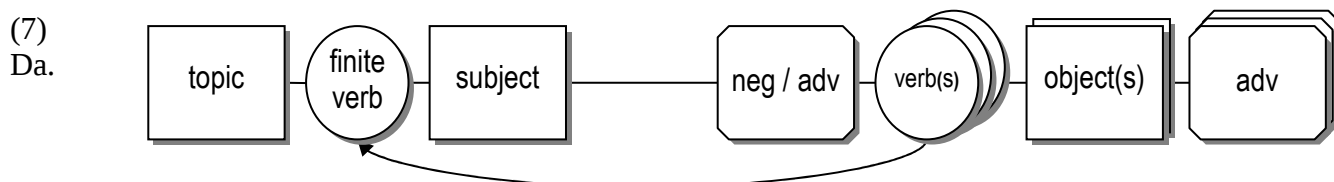


<i>Therefore</i>		<i>he</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>not</i>	<i>eaten</i>	<i>the apple</i>	<i>yesterday.</i>
a. does not have to be filled.	b. must be filled if topic is a <i>wh</i> - or a negative element. If no aux, use <i>do</i> .	c. must contain a subject.	d. must be filled if there is an aux or a <i>not</i> . If no aux, use <i>do</i> .	e. may contain <i>not</i> and/or medial sentential adverbials	f. may contain one or more verbs.	g. may contain one or two objects (or a subject predicate) (or obj. plus obj. predicate)	h. may contain one or more adverbials.
Danish ≠ English				Danish = English			

2. The left part of the clause

2.1 Main and embedded clauses in general

In **Danish**, both the finite verb circle and the topic box must be filled in main clauses, (7)b-d, but not in embedded clauses, (7)a:



a.	fordi			Peter		aldrig	drikker	urtete.	
b.		Peter	drikker			aldrig		urtete.	
c.		Urtete	drikker	Peter		aldrig.			
d.		Måske	drikker	Peter		aldrig		urtete.	

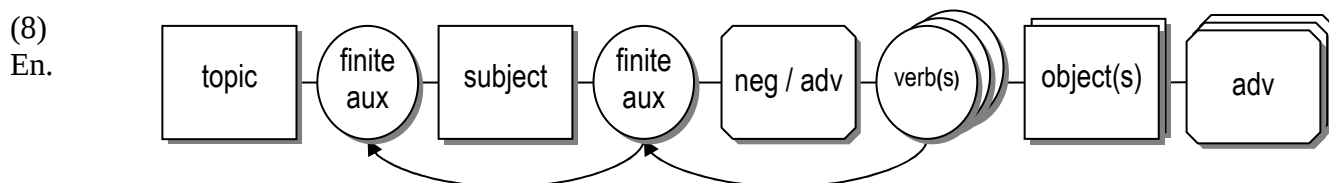
This property, that both the finite verb circle and the topic box must be filled in main clauses, is often referred to as "**verb second**", as the finite verb must be in second position in all main clauses. Verb second is a property common to all Germanic languages, with just one exception: English.

The arrow in (7) indicates "**movement**" of the finite verb from the verb circle to the finite verb circle. This is just one possible way of representing the observation that the finite verb *drikker* either occurs in the verb circle, (7)a, or in the finite verb circle, (7)b-d, but never in both.

Similar arrows could actually have been drawn from the subject box to the topic box, to represent the difference between (7)a and (7)b, or from the object box to the topic box, to represent the difference between (7)a and (7)c.

In **English**, the topic box does not have to be filled in main clauses, and nor does the first finite aux circle. In fact, the subject never occupies the topic box in English.

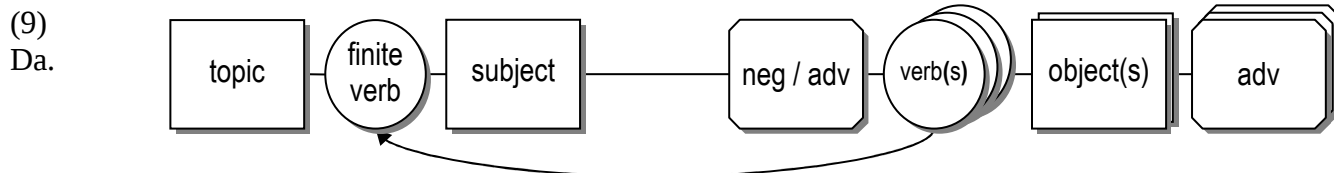
The result is that the differences between main and embedded clauses are much less striking in English than in Danish:



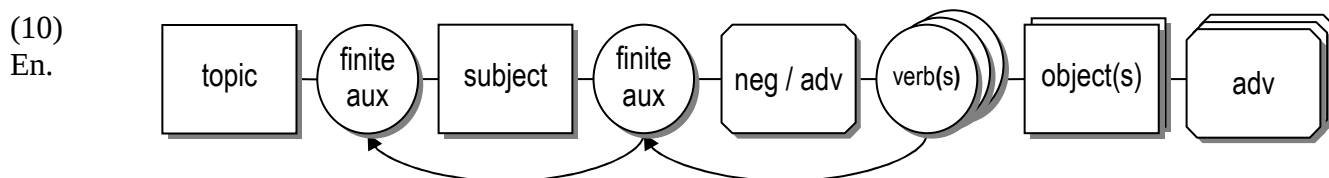
a.	as			Peter		never	drinks	herbal tea.	
b.				Peter		never	drinks	herbal tea.	
c.		Herbal tea		Peter		never	drinks.		
d.		Maybe		Peter		never	drinks	herbal tea.	

2.2 Topics that force subject-verb inversion

In Danish main clauses, the first finite verb circle has to be filled (giving rise to subject-verb inversion) whenever the topic box is filled, (9)a-c. In English main clauses, the only topics that force the first finite aux circle to be filled (giving rise to subject-auxiliary inversion) are question elements (*wh*-elements), (10)a, or negative elements, (10)b:

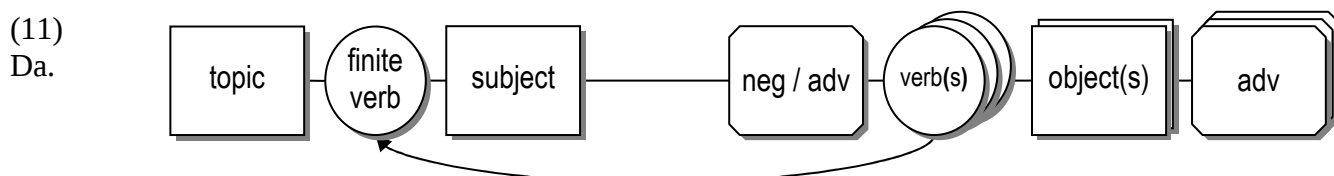


a.	Hvornår	havde	Peter			set	det her rod?	
b.	Aldrig	havde	Peter			set	sådan et rod.	
c.	Måske	havde	Peter			set	sådan et rod	før.

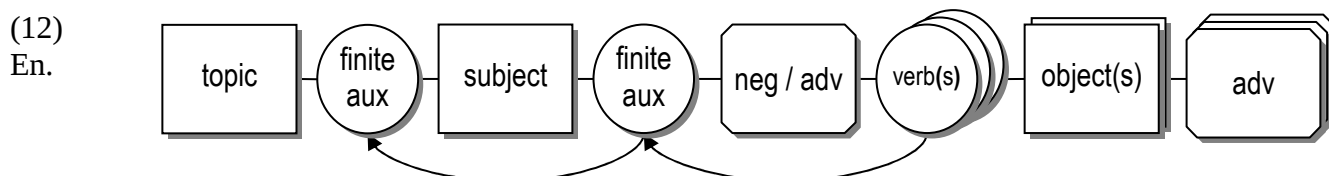


a.	When	had	Peter			seen	this mess?	
b.	Never	had	Peter			seen	such a mess.	
c.	Perhaps		Peter	had		seen	such a mess	before.

Danish and English have in common that the first finite circle is filled in **main clause questions**, but not in **embedded questions**:



a.	(Jeg spurgte)	hvornår		Peter			havde set	det her rod.	
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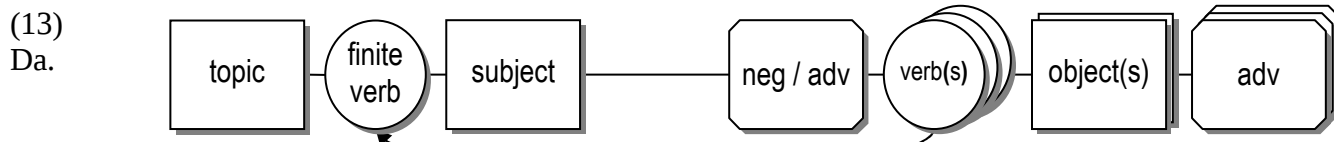
a.	(I asked)	when		Peter	had		seen	this mess.	
----	-----------	------	--	-------	-----	--	------	------------	--

(If the finite verb is not in the first verb circle, then it must be in another one. The different placements of *had* vs. *havde* in (11) & (12) will be discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2 below.)

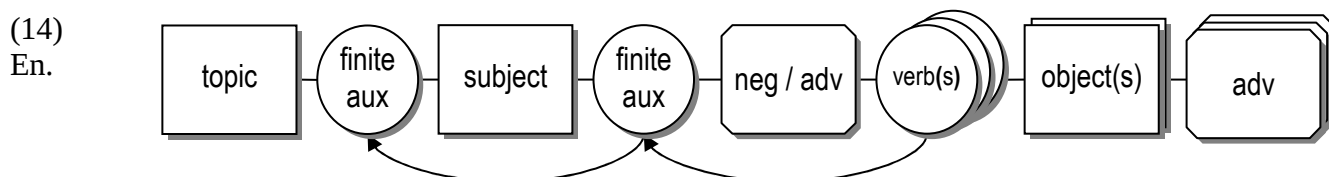
2.3 Verb-initial clauses: Yes/no-questions and conditionals

In the previous section, we saw whether the topic box could be filled without the first verb circle also being filled. This section is about the mirror image situation, namely whether the first verb circle could be filled without the topic box also being filled.

In both languages, there are two cases when this happens (the first verb circle is filled without the topic box also being filled), namely main clause *yes/no*-questions, (13)h & (14)h, and conditional clauses, (13)i & (14)i. The following tables also summarise the previous two sections:



a.		Peter	havde			allerede	set	det her rod.	
b.		Hvornår	havde	Peter			set	det her rod?	
c.		Aldrig	havde	Peter			set	sådan et rod.	
d.		Måske	havde	Peter			set	sådan et rod	før.
e.	fordi			Peter		allerede	havde set	det her rod.	
f.	...	hvornår		Peter			havde set	det her rod.	
g.	om			Peter		allerede	havde set	det her rod.	
h.			Havde	Peter		allerede	set	det her rod?	
i.			Havde	Peter			set	det her rod, ...	



a.				Peter	had	already	seen	this mess.	
b.		When	had	Peter			seen	this mess?	
c.		Never	had	Peter			seen	such a mess.	
d.		Perhaps		Peter	had		seen	such a mess	before.
e.	as			Peter	had	already	seen	this mess.	
f.	...	when		Peter	had		seen	this mess.	
g.	if			Peter	had	already	seen	this mess.	
h.			Had	Peter		already	seen	this mess?	
i.			Had	Peter			seen	this mess, ...	

Notice the distinction between *wh*-questions (*hv*-spørgsmål, *delspørgsmål*), (9)a, (10)a, (11), (12), and *yes/no*-questions (*ja/nej*-spørgsmål, *helspørgsmål*), (13)h & (14)h.

Notice also that embedded *yes/no*-questions, (13)g & (14)g, are not marked by having the finite verb in the first finite circle, but instead by a special subordinating conjunction, *om/hvorvidt* & *if/whether*.

Conditionals are always embedded clauses. Here are possible contexts for (13)i & (14)i:

- (15) a. Da. Havde Peter set det her rod, så ville han måske ikke være taget afsted.
b. En. Had Peter seen this mess, then he might not have left.

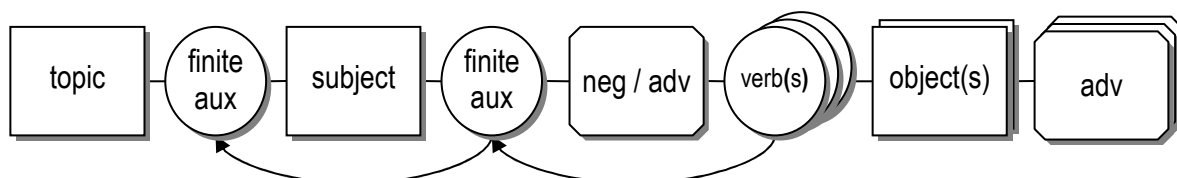
3. The central part of the clause

3.1 Finite verb circle vs. finite aux circle

When the topic is a question element or a negative element, then the first finite aux circle **must be filled** in English. This is also true for main clause *yes/no*-questions.

Furthermore, as it is a finite **aux** circle, then it has to be filled by an auxiliary. If there is no auxiliary, then one has to be inserted, namely **do**:

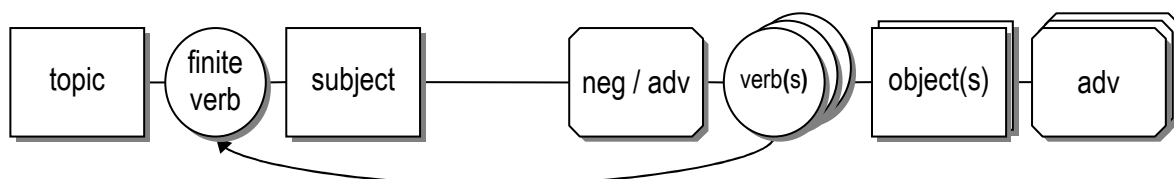
(16)
En.



a.	At no point	did	Peter		actually	leave	the room.	
b.	When	did	Peter		actually	leave	the room?	
c.		Did	Peter		actually	leave	the room?	
d.	At 2:13		Peter		actually	left	the room.	
f.			Peter		actually	left	the room.	

The first finite **aux** circle in English corresponds to the one and only finite **verb** circle in **Danish**, but as it is a finite **verb** circle, any finite verb can occur here (of course including auxiliaries). Thus Danish has nothing that corresponds to *do*-insertion. Also, as seen in sections 2.1 & 2.2, the finite verb circle in Danish is filled in all main clauses.

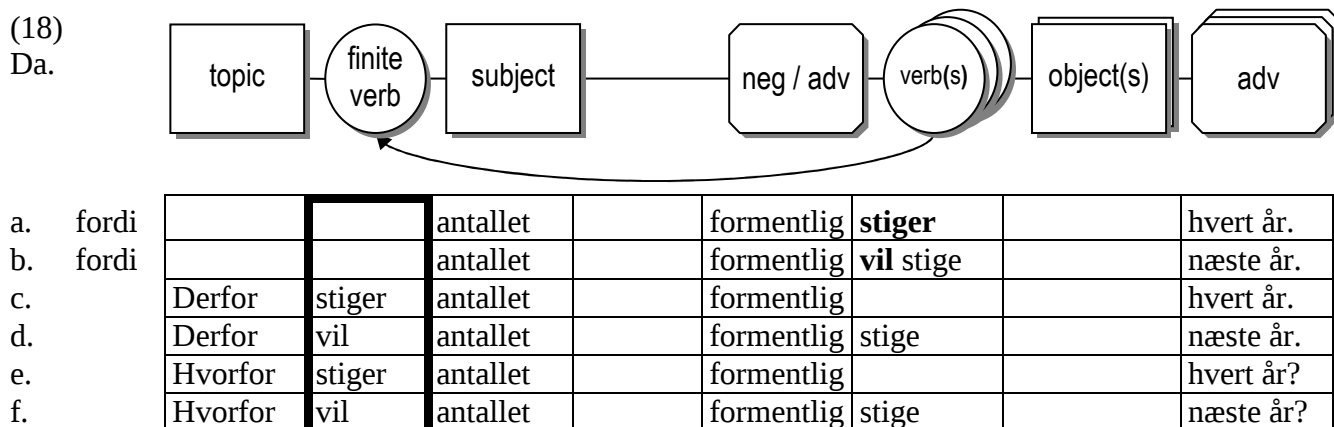
(17)
Da.



a.	På intet tidspunkt	forlod	Peter		faktisk		lokalet.	
b.	Hvornår	forlod	Peter		egentlig		lokalet?	
c.		Forlod	Peter		egentlig		lokalet?	
d.	Kl. 14:13	forlod	Peter		faktisk		lokalet.	
f.	Peter	forlod			faktisk		lokalet.	

3.2 There is no second finite (verb) circle in Danish

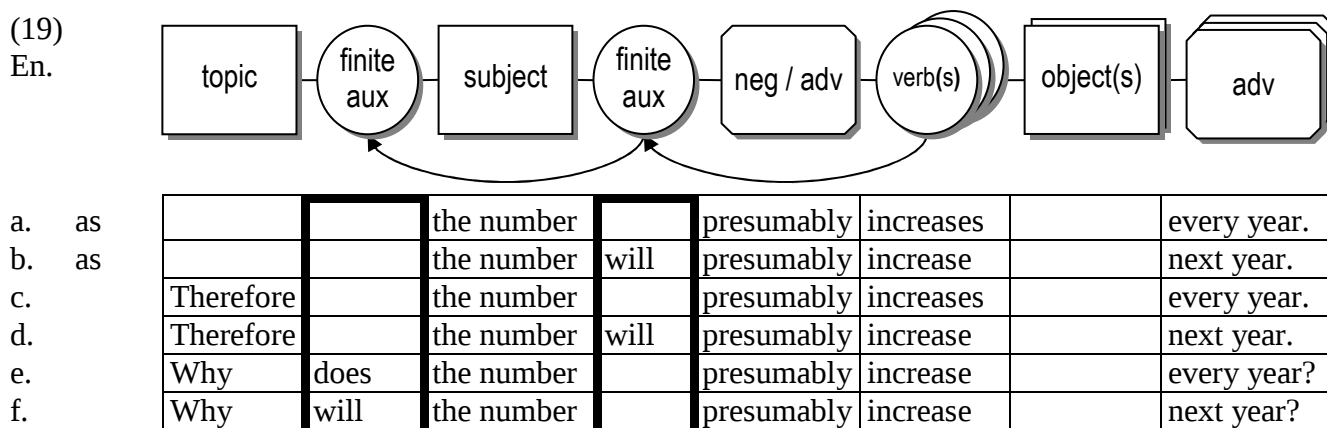
In Danish, there is **only one** finite verb circle. As seen above, the finite verb occurs in the verb circle(s) in all embedded clauses, (18)a-b, and in the finite verb circle in all main clauses, (18)c-f :



In English, on the other hand, there are **two** finite aux circles.

A finite **main verb** has to occur in the verb circle(s), (19)a,c,e, as the two circles further left only admit auxiliaries.

A finite **auxiliary** either occurs in the second finite aux circle, (19)b,d, or in the first one, (19)e-f, depending on the content of the topic box (cf. section 2.2 above):



Brief summary:

- In both languages the verb circle(s) contains all non-finite verbs.
- In English, the verb circle(s) always also contains finite main verbs (but not finite auxiliaries).
- In Danish, the verb circle(s) also contains the finite verb in all embedded clauses (but not the finite verb in main clauses).

3.3 Special properties of not: do-insertion and contracted negation

In English, *not* **requires** an auxiliary, (20)a,c, as opposed to other negative expressions e.g. *never*, (20)d. As above, if there is no auxiliary, then one is inserted, namely **do**, (20)c:

(20) En.

a.	Therefore		the number	will	not	increase		next year.
b.	Therefore		the number	will	never	increase		again.
c.	Therefore		the number	did	not	increase		last year.
d.	Therefore		the number		never	increased		again.

In Danish, neither *ikke* nor any other negative expressions, e.g. *aldrig*, **requires** an auxiliary, (15)c,d:

(21) Da.

a.	Derfor	vil	antallet		ikke	stige		næste år.
b.	Derfor	vil	antallet		aldrig	stige		igen.
c.	Derfor	steg	antallet		ikke			sidste år.
d.	Derfor	steg	antallet		aldrig			igen.

English *not* also has another special property (independent of *do*-insertion): It may **contract** with a finite auxiliary, e.g. (22)b, *had not* ~ *hadn't*, *is not* ~ *isn't*, *can not* ~ *can't*, *will not* ~ *won't*. When *not* contracts with an auxiliary, it becomes part of the auxiliary, cf. that it comes along when the auxiliary moves to the first finite aux circle, (22)d.

(22) En.

a.	Therefore		the number	might	not	increase		next year.
b.	Therefore		the number	mightn't		increase		next year.
c.		Might	the number		not	increase		next year?
d.		Mightn't	the number			increase		next year?

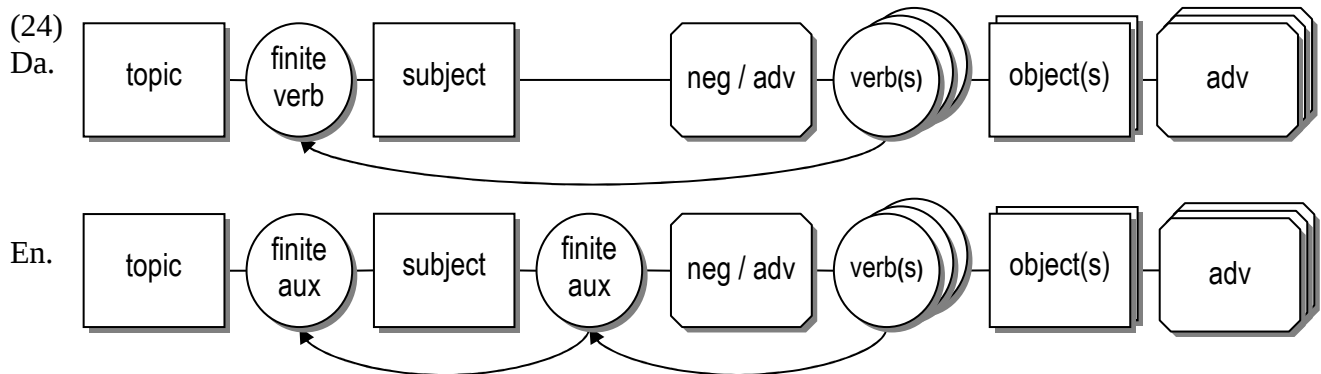
In Danish, *ikke* never contracts with any verbs, but in colloquial Norwegian it may:

- (23) a. Da. Kan du ikke komme hjem snart?
 b. No. Kankke du komme hjem snart?
Can('t) you (not) come home soon?

4. The right part of the clause

4.1 Options in the verb circle(s)

Danish and English both have the following five different options regarding the verb circle(s):



no verb in the verb circle

a.	Hvor	er	Peter				i dag?
b.	Where	is	Peter				today?

one verb in the verb circle

c.	Hvor	havde	Peter		egentlig	efterladt	bilen	i fredags?
d.	Where	had	Peter		actually	left	the car	last Friday?

two verbs in the verb circle

e.	Hvorfor	skulle	Peter			have købt	en ny bil	i går?
f.	Why	should	Peter			have bought	a new car	yesterday?

three verbs in the verb circle

g.	Hvordan	kan	bilen			være blevet repareret		allerede?
h.	How	can	the car			have been repaired		already?

four verbs in the verb circle

i.	Hvordan	burde	ulykken			kunne have været undgået?		
j.	Why	must	the car			have been being repaired		at 3:15 PM yesterday?

Inside the verb circle(s), every verb form (except the first one, which has to be the finite verb) is determined by the preceding verb, according to the following rules of combination:

(25)		Danish	English
a.	FINITE VERB	finite form (present or past)	finite form (present or past)
b.	MODAL	modal verb + infinitive	modal verb + infinitive
c.	MODAL	modal verb + infinitive	
d.	PERFECT	<i>have/være</i> + past participle	<i>have</i> + past participle
e.	PROGRESSIVE		<i>be</i> + present participle
f.	PASSIVE	<i>blive/være</i> + past participle	<i>be</i> + past participle

As was mentioned, (25)a is obligatory, but all the other rules, (25)b-f, are optional and independent of each other, as long as the sequence is observed. This can be seen in the examples on the previous page:

(24)a,b	follow	(25)a	
(24)c,d	follow	(25)a,d	
(24)d,f	follow	(25)a,b,d	
(24)g,h	follow	(25)a,b,d,f	
(24)i	follow	(25)a,b,c,d,f	(Only Danish can combine two modal verbs, because English modal verbs only have finite forms.)
(24)j	follow	(25)a,b,d,e,f	(Only English has progressive in this form.)

These rules cover all the verbs in the clause regardless of whether the finite verb is on its own in one of the finite circles or together with all the non-finite verbs in the verb circle(s):

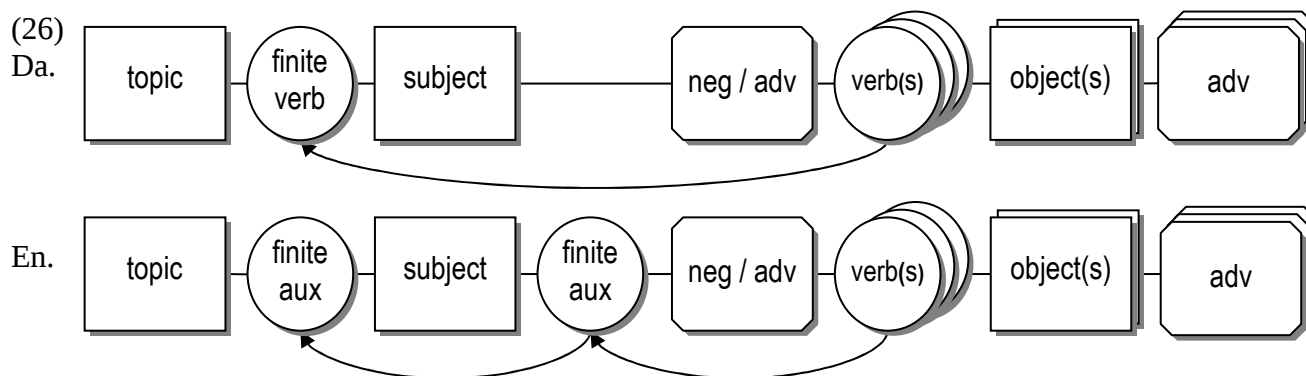
Furthermore, the tense of the clause is determined by the choices in (25)a,b,d,e:

- The obligatory (25)a chooses between PRESENT and PAST.
- The optional (25)b makes the tense FUTURE (if the modal verb used is a form of *will/ville*).
- The optional (25)d makes the tense PERFECT.
- The optional (25)e makes the tense PROGRESSIVE (only in English,
in Danish they are formed by *være ved at* ____ or *stå/sidde og* ____)

For a full list of all the different tense forms and their morphological structure, see Appendix B.

4.2 Options in the object box(es)

Danish and English both have the following five different options regarding the object box(es)
(i.e. they both have the following five verb complementation patterns):



no object

(clause type: S+V)

a.	Hvorfor	skal	han			rejse		i dag?
b.	Why	must	he			leave		today?

(S+V+A)

a.	Hvorfor	skal	han			bo		i Århus?
b.	Why	must	he			live		i York?

one object

(S+V+DO)

c.	Hvorfor	skal	jeg			læse	bogen	i dag?
d.	Why	must	I			read	the book	today?

(S+V+DO+A)

c.	Hvorfor	skal	jeg			anbringe	rosen	i en vase?
d.	Why	must	I			put	the rose	in a vase?

two objects

(S+V+IO+DO)

e.	Hvorfor	havde	hun			lånt	Ib bilen	i går?
f.	Why	had	she			leant	Joe the car	yesterday?

a subject predicate

(S+V+SC)

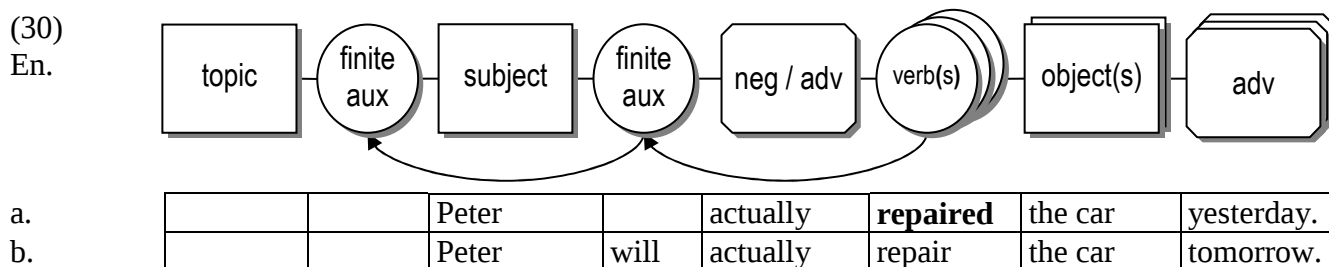
g.	Hvorfor	skal	vi			være	flinke	i dag?
h.	Why	must	we			be	nice	today?

an object and an object predicate

(S+V+DO+OC)

i.	Hvorfor	havde	de			kaldt	Ida et fjols	i går?
j.	Why	had	they			called	Ann a fool	yesterday?

Instead, as follows from the analysis above (section 3), a finite main verb in English always has to be placed in the verb circle(s), i.e. following the medial adverbial if there is one:



5.2 Possible extensions

It is also possible to extend the analysis suggested in this paper further so that it can account for other phenomena in the clause structure of Danish and English, e.g.

- light objects in Danish (*Peter så ham ikke*)
(they occupy a position corresponding to the missing finite verb circle)
- negative objects in Danish (*Peter havde ingen penge fået*)
(Dan. negative objects occur in the neg/adv box, Eng. ones in the object box)
- verb particles in both languages (*Jeg smed bogen ud*, *I threw out the book*, *I threw the book out*).

Another potential advantage that I have not discussed in any detail is the compatibility with analyses of other related languages, e.g. French, German and Icelandic (cf. *Almen Sprogforståelse*):

- French and Icelandic have two finite circles like English, but finite **verb** circles like Danish.
- Icelandic has obligatory filling of topic and first finite verb circle in main clauses, French does not.
- German would be much like Danish, but with the verb circle(s) at the very end.
(cf. e.g. Vikner 1999b, Wöllstein-Leisten & al. 1997).

Appendix A: Finiteness

(31) **Finiteness:**

- Main clauses** must contain a **finite** verb.
- Only **finite** verbs are inflected for **tense**, i.e., marked for either **present** or **past**.
- Only **finite** verbs may display **agreement** in number and person with the subject.

		REGULAR = WEAK	IRREGULAR ≈ STRONG	
(32) a.	(I)	work	break	FINITE: PRESENT TENSE, 1 ST PERS. SING.
b.	(She)	works	breaks	FINITE: PRESENT TENSE, 3 RD PERS SING.
c.	(She)	worked	broke	FINITE: PAST TENSE
d.	(to)	work	break	NON-FINITE: INFINITIVE
e.	(She is)	working	breaking	NON-FINITE: PRESENT PARTICIPLE
f.	(She has)	worked	broken	NON-FINITE: PAST PARTICIPLE

Appendix B: Full list of tenses

(33)			$\pm$ PAST	$\pm$ FUT	$\pm$ PERF	$\pm$ PROG
a.	works	PRESENT	-	-	-	-
b.	has worked	PRESENT PERFECT	-	-	+	-
c.	will work	FUTURE	-	+	-	-
d.	will have worked	FUTURE PERFECT	-	+	+	-
e.	worked	PAST	+	-	-	-
f.	had worked	PAST PERFECT	+	-	+	-
g.	would work	FUTURE OF THE PAST	+	+	-	-
h.	would have worked	FUTURE PERFECT OF THE PAST	+	+	+	-
			(25)a (34)	(25)b (35)	(25)d (36)	(25)e (37)

This system (cf. Vikner 2003) thus has eight tenses, because the three features $\pm$ PAST, $\pm$ FUTURE and $\pm$ PERFECT can be freely combined. Apart from being logically consistent, this system of eight tenses also makes very easy to state the morphological properties of the tenses:

- (34) a. The first element of a + PAST tense ends in *-ed*,
 b. The first element of a - PAST tense ends in *-s* or zero.
- (35) a. A + FUTURE tense involves a form of *will* (or *shall*) followed by an infinitive.
 b. A - FUTURE tense does not.
- (36) a. A + PERFECT tense involves a form of *have* followed by a past participle.
 b. A - PERFECT tense does not.

The generalisations in (34)-(36) are very similar to the ones valid for e.g. Danish (or German). There is however a further set of generalisations, which are unique to English, concerning the so-called **progressive** tenses:

- (37) a. A + PROGRESSIVE tense involves a form of *be* followed by a present participle.
 b. A - PROGRESSIVE tense does not.

English thus has the eight (non-progressive) tenses in (33) as well as eight progressive ones:

(38)			$\pm$ PAST	$\pm$ FUT	$\pm$ PERF	$\pm$ PROG
a.	is working	PRESENT PROGRESSIVE	-	-	-	+
b.	has been working	PRESENT PERFECT PROGRESSIVE	-	-	+	+
c.	will be working	FUTURE PROGRESSIVE	-	+	-	+
d.	will have been working	FUTURE PERFECT PROGRESSIVE	-	+	+	+
e.	was working	PAST PROGRESSIVE	+	-	-	+
f.	had been working	PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE	+	-	+	+
g.	would be working	FUTURE PROGRESSIVE OF THE PAST	+	+	-	+
h.	would have been working	FUTURE PERFECT PROGRESSIVE OF THE PAST	+	+	+	+
			(25)a (34)	(25)b (35)	(25)d (36)	(25)e (37)