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Functions of clause-initial constituents  
in Scandinavian languages

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The Original Sin ([www.rosettaproject.org](http://www.rosettaproject.org))

Parallel texts (mostly versions of Genesis) from over 2,000 languages

Non-subject initial sentences

Swedish: 26 (out of 52)

Danish : 28

Bokmål : 32

Nynorsk : 33

Faroese : 31

Icelandic : 32

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English : 19

French : 10

Considering the great number of non subject initial clauses in Scandinavian languages, it could be argued that these languages are not SVO as is often assumed, but rather XVY where Y = Subject unless X = Subject. The finite verb has to appear in second position (the « V2 parameter »). Subject-initial clauses should not be considered to manifest basic Scandinavian word order, but just instantiate one possible XVY-structure (cf. Diderichsens (1946) positional grammar of Scandinavian languages, where subjects are not « base-generated » in the first position (the « foundation » , *fundament*), but « moved » there from a postverbal position) :

1. 

Foundation	V	S	....	O
Kalle	läste	–		tidningen
Charles	read			paper.DEF

‘Charles read his paper.’ / ‘Charles lisait son journal.’
  
2. 

Foundation	V	S	....	O
Tidningen	läste	Kalle	–	
paper.DEF	read	Charles		

‘His paper, Charles read.’ / ‘Son journal, C. le lisait.’

It is predicted that non subject initial clauses will always display XVS in Scandinavian, but XSV in non-V2 languages such as English and French. Surprisingly, in the parallel corpus mentioned above, a number of XVS sentences in Scandinavian actually had SVX counterparts in English and French, particularly in the latter language.

## Different types of inhabitants in the Foundation :

### A. Conjunctional adverbial

1. **Så** gick vi hem.  
so went we home  
'So we went home.' / 'Alors nous sommes rentrés.'

### B. Frame-creating temporal or locative adverbial

2. **Nästa år** skall jag åka till Italien.  
next year will I go to Italy  
'Next year I will go to Italy.' /  
'L'année prochaine, j'irai en Italie.'

3. **På bussen** läste Pelle tidningen.  
on bus.DEF read Peter paper.DEF  
'On the bus Peter read his paper.' /  
'Dans le bus, Pierre lisait son journal.'

cf. « locative inversion » displaying V2 in English:

4. **Through the door** rushes his brother....  
(Haegeman 2006 :61)
5. **Here** comes the sun. (Lennon-MacCartney)

and apparent V2 in French :

6. **Sur l'autre rive** débutent les beaux quartiers.  
on the other shore begin the fancy quarters  
'On the other shore, the fancy quarters begin.'  
? 'On the other shore begin the fancy quarters.'  
(Riegel, Pellat & Rioul 1994 :138)

## C. Frame-creating phrasal adverbial

7. **När jag kom hem** var klockan redan tre.  
when I got back was clock.DEF already three  
'When I got back, it was already three o'clock.' /  
'Quand je suis rentré, il était déjà trois heures.'  
'Me voilà rentré, il était déjà trois heures.'

Manner adverbials seem to behave more like arguments :

8. **Med möda** öppnade han dörren.  
with difficulty opened he door.DEF  
'With difficulty he opened the door.'  
'Avec difficulté il a ouvert la porte.'

## D. Fronted argument

9. **Bananer** äter vi varje morgon.  
bananas eat we every morning  
'Bananas, we eat every morning.' /  
'Des bananes, nous en mangeons chaque matin.'
10. **I skåpet** satte jag glaset.  
in cupboard.DEF put I glass.DEF  
'In the cupboard I put the glass.' /  
'Dans le placard, j'ai mis le verre.'

11. **Till Österland** vill jag fara.  
to Orient want I travel  
'To the Orient I want to travel.' /  
'A l'Orient je veux voyager.'

#### E. Predicatives

12. **Läkare** blev han.  
doctor became he  
'A doctor he became.' /  
'Médecin, il est devenu.' ( ?)

13. **Roligt** var det.  
fun was it  
'Fun, it was.' / 'Amusant, c'était.'

cf. predicative inversion with V2 in English :

14. These are shocking figures, but **even more shocking** is the fact that at least half of the people behind these crimes will go undetected. (Kreyer 2006:34)

#### F. Dislocated argument + resumptive pronoun

15. **Kalle**, **honom** gillar jag.  
Charles him like I  
'Charles, him I like.'  
'Charles, lui, je l'aime bien.'

Interestingly, as (8) shows, the resumptive pronoun in Scandinavian needs to undergo ordinary fronting itself. (9) with the pronoun *in situ* is quite bad :

16. ?? **Kalle**, jag gillar **hon**  
Charles I like him

G. « Continuous » topic (Engdahl 1999)

17. *Jag köpte en sådan intressant bok igår.*  
I bought a such interesting book yesterday  
*Den skall jag läsa när jag kommer hem.*  
it will I read when I get home  
'I bought such an interesting book yesterday.  
I will read **it** when I get home.'  
'J'ai acheté un livre tellement intéressant hier.  
Je vais **le** lire quand je rentre.'

If the topical pronominal stays *in situ* (as in English and French) the sentence is not ungrammatical in Scandinavian, but rhythmically awkward :

18. *Jag köpte en sådan intressant bok igår.*  
I bought a such interesting book yesterday  
??*Jag skall läsa den när jag kommer hem.*  
I will read it when I get home

## H. Contrastive topic (after Engdahl 1999)

19. **KALLE** gillar jag, men **EVA** står jag inte ut med.  
Charles like I but Eva stand I not out with  
'Charles I like, but Eva I cannot stand.'  
'Charles, je l'aime bien, mais Eva, elle, je ne la  
supporte pas.'

## I. Clefts

20. Det är Kalle som vi gillar. (cleft)  
it is Charles that we like  
'It is Charles that we like.'  
'C'est Charles que nous aimons bien.'
21. **Kalle** är det som vi gillar. (reverse cleft)  
Charles is it that we like  
'Charles it is that we like.' (?)  
« Charles est-ce que nous aimons bien »
22. **Den som vi gillar** är Kalle. (pseudo-cleft)  
the-one who we like is Charles  
'The one whom we like is Charles.'  
'Celui que nous aimons bien, c'est Charles.'
23. Kalle är den som vi gillar. (reverse p-cleft)  
Charles is the-one who we like  
'Charles is the one whom we like.'  
'Charles est celui que nous aimons bien.'



## **Concluding remarks**

The contents of the clause-initial position display considerable variation in Scandinavian languages, as exemplified by Swedish. This is in line with Diderichsen's (1946) proposal that the « foundation » is a category-neutral position, whereas the second position is obligatorily occupied by the finite verb only. In all instances of non subject initial clauses, Swedish displays XVS syntax. It would seem that the V2 parameter facilitates sentence-internal fronting of linguistic material of various kinds. In non V2-languages, sentence-external operations such as dislocation and clefting would seem to be more common. It was however found that Scandinavian languages also allow dislocation, provided that the resumptive pronoun filling the trace of the dislocated constituent is itself fronted in the Scandinavian way. French sometimes resorts to multiple dislocation in this case (*Charles, lui, je l'aime bien*).

It was further hypothesized that English and French, which are both V3 languages, would exhibit XSV where Scandinavian has XVY. This prediction was borne out, with the following exceptions :

- English seems to allow locative and predicative inversion (i.e. XVS)
- French allows inversion in case the verb is non transitive, but the following examples (Larsson Ringqvist 2010 :71) seem to indicate that we are not dealing with V2 after all :

24. Au bout de l'allée **brillait** une lumière  
at the end of the alley was-shining a light
25. Au bout de l'allée **avait brillé** une lumière  
at the end of the alley had been-shining a light
26. \*Au bout de l'allée **avait** une lumière **brillé**  
at the end of the alley had a light been-shining

In Scandinavian languages (except Icelandic?), (25) would be ungrammatical and (26) grammatical.

Conjunctive adverbials and frame-creating temporal and locative adverbials would seem to exhibit the same behaviour in the languages under analysis.

Heavy preposed adverbial clauses seem to be more common in French than in Scandinavian and in English, presumably for stylistic reasons. French would also seem to prefer non-finite constructions here, such as *Me voilà rentré, il était déjà trois heures.*

Fronted arguments (of all kinds) and fronted manner adverbials also occur in English (but with V3, cf. so

called Yiddish Movement). It would seem that French sometimes uses clefts here : *C'est avec difficulté qu'il a ouvert la porte.*

Continuous topic has no counterpart in English or French.

Contrastive topic seems to demand multiple dislocation in French (cf. the discussion above).

Clefting and pseudo-clefting fit into the XVS pattern in Scandinavian. In English and French, reverse clefts (*Kalle är det som vi gillar*) seem to be avoided, whereas these conform perfectly well to the topological pattern Foundation + finite verb in Scandinavian.

## **Conclusion**

The V2 parameter + a category-neutral initial position permit considerable sentence-internal variation in the Scandinavian clause. In non V2-languages such as English and French, we instead find XSV or even SVO in corresponding cases. Interestingly enough, English however seems to display V2 in locative and predicative inversion, whereas apparent V2 in French rather seems to involve sentence-final subjects.

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