

## Subject placement with respect to negation

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### 1. Introduction

Most main clauses in the Scandinavian languages are subject-initial, which combined with the V2 (verb second) requirement means that the subject is immediately followed by the finite verb. However, in embedded clauses without verb movement in Mainland Scandinavian, as well as in non-subject-initial matrix clauses, the position of the subject may interact with the position of sentential adverbials and negation. The issue of the relative order between subjects and adverbs/negation in such contexts has been discussed extensively in the literature on Scandinavian languages. This chapter will focus on Mainland Scandinavian, as these are the languages for which we have relevant data in the Nordic Syntax Database.

As pointed out by several people, Norwegian and Swedish tend to allow nominal subjects to either precede or follow sentential adverbs and negation, as illustrated in (1). Pronominal subjects, on the other hand, are strongly preferred in a position preceding these elements, as shown in (2) (cf. among many others Faarlund 1977, Holmberg 1990, 1993, Faarlund et al. 1997, Nilsen 1997, Teleman et al. 1999, Svenonius 2002, Westergaard & Vangsnes 2005, Andréasson 2007, Bentzen 2009, Westergaard 2011, Østbø Munch 2013):

(1) a. Denne boka Leser **studentene** ikke lengre. (Norwegian)

*this book.the read students.the not anymore*

b. Denne boka Leser ikke **studentene** lengre.

*this book.the read not students.the anymore*

‘The students don’t read this book anymore.’

- (2) a. Denne boka Leser **de** ikke lengre. (Norwegian)  
*this book.the read they not anymore*
- b. \*Denne boka Leser ikke **de** lengre.  
*this book.the read not they anymore*  
 ‘They don’t read this book anymore.’

In Danish, on the other hand, the only possible position for a subject is preceding adverbs/negation, regardless of whether the subject is a nominal or a pronominal element (cf. e.g. Holmberg 1993, Svenonius 2002). Thus, only the word orders in the a-examples above are supposed to be possible in Danish.

However, as pointed out in the extensive overview in Østbø Munch (2013), several Norwegian dialects have traditionally allowed pronominal subjects following negation, for example the dialects spoken in Oppdal, Bergen and in the North Western part of Norway (see Østbø Munch 2013 and references therein). The position of pronominal subjects with respect to negation was therefore tested within the Nordic Syntax Database. The results are presented in the following section.

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Nordic Syntax Database (NSD)

For Danish, several embedded clauses with a pronominal subject following negation were tested<sup>1</sup>, two of which are illustrated in (3)-(4):

- (3) a. Han sagde at ikke **han** ville. (#1333) (Danish)  
*he said that not he wanted*  
 ‘He said that he didn’t want to.’
- b. Han spurgte hvorfor ikke **hun** kom til tiden. (#1331) (Danish)  
*he asked why not she came to time.the*  
 ‘He asked why she didn’t come in time.’

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<sup>1</sup> Examples #1323-1324, #1326-1328, and #1330-1341 in the Nordic Syntax Database (NSD).

- (4) a. Jeg bliver vred hvis ikke **du** gør det nu. (#1330) (Danish)

*I get angry if not you do it now*

‘I’ll get angry if you don’t do it now.’

- b. Hvorfor skulle han gøre sig umage når ikke **du** gør din del? (#1334)  
(Danish)

*why should he make REFL bother when not you do your part*

‘Why should he bother when you don’t do your share?’

In general, these examples were judged as ungrammatical by the Danish informants. There were only two exceptions; the examples in (4) were both judged as good by all the speakers.

In Norway, Sweden, and Finland, one sentence with a pronominal subject following negation was tested:

- (5) Derfor leste ikke **han** den. (#1376) (Norwegian)

*therefore read not he it*

‘Therefore, he didn’t read it.’

As Map 1 shows, this sentence is generally rejected in Norway, but tends to get higher scores in Sweden.

In Finland, this sentences if mostly accepted:



Map 1: Pronominal subjects following negation in a non-subject initial clause.

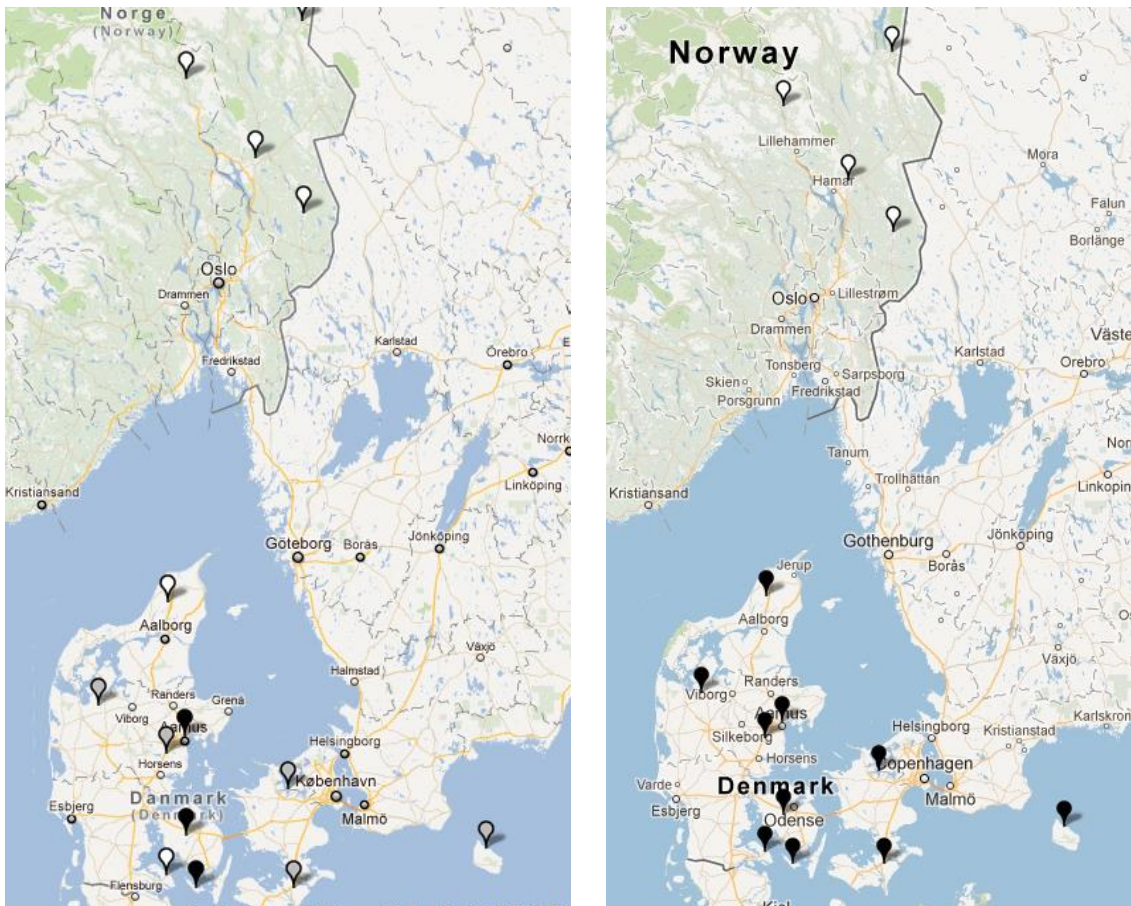
(#1376: *Derfor leste ikke han den.* 'Therefore he didn't read it.')

(White = high score; grey = medium score; black = low score)

In addition, the position of subjects with respect to negation in clauses introduced by adverbial *maybe* was tested in Denmark and in four locations in Eastern Norway (Kirkenær, Drevsjø, Stange, and Brekkom). In these types of clauses, V2 tends to be optional, at least in Norwegian and Swedish, see [Bentzen \(2014a\)](#). The relative position of the subject and negation in preverbal positions was investigated with the examples in (6)-(7). Both pronominal and DP subjects were included:

- (6) a. Måske han ikke **kommer**. (#313) (Danish)  
*maybe he not comes*
- b. Måske ikke han **kommer**. (#316) (Danish)  
*maybe not he comes*  
'Maybe he won't come.'
- (7) a. Måske Peter ikke **kommer**. (#318) (Danish)  
*maybe Peter not comes*
- b. Måske ikke Peter **kommer**. (#320) (Danish)  
*maybe not Peter comes*  
'Maybe Peter won't come.'

As Maps 2-3 show, a pronominal subject may either precede or follow negation in such clauses in Norwegian. In Danish, on the other hand, both sentences are degraded. Note, however, that the example with the pronominal subject following negation, (6b) (#316) is judged as substantially worse than the one with the pronominal subject preceding negation, (6a) (#313):



Maps 2-3: *Pronominal subjects and negation in clauses introduced by maybe without verb movement.*

Map 2: *Pronominal subject preceding negation.* Map 3: *Pronominal subject following negation.*

(#313: *Måske han ikke kommer.*)

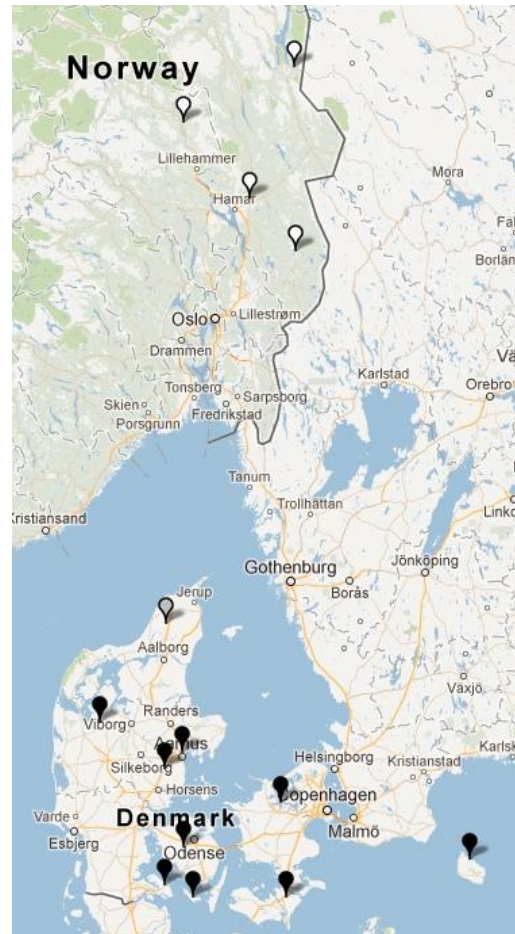
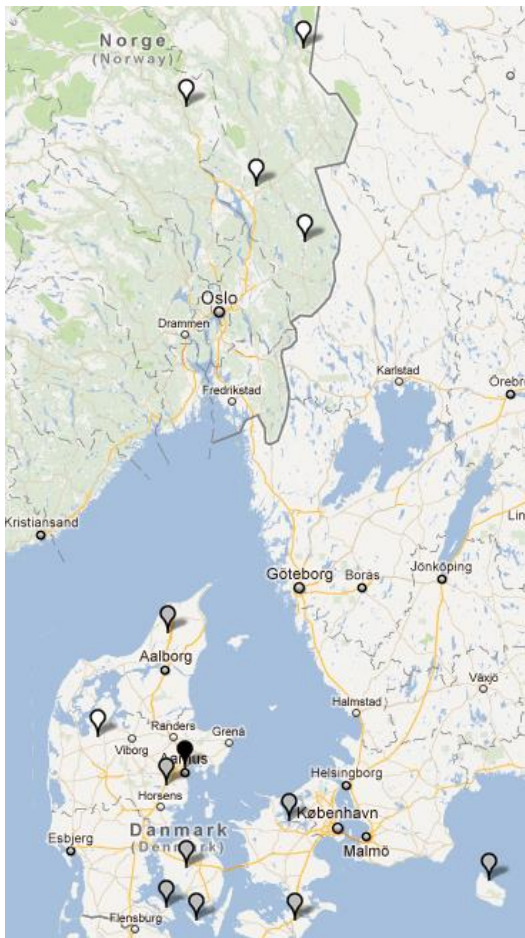
(#316: *Måske ikke han kommer.*)

(‘*Maybe he won’t come.*’)

(*White pins represent high scores; grey pins represent medium scores; black pins represent low scores*)

A similar pattern is seen with nominal subjects; again, both word orders are accepted in the four Norwegian locations, while both examples are strongly degraded in Danish. Furthermore, we again see that the example with the nominal subject following negation (#320) is judged as worse than the one with a nominal subject preceding negation (#318):





Maps 4-5: Nominal subjects and negation in clauses introduced by *maybe* without verb movement.

Map 4: Nominal subject preceding negation.

Map 5: Nominal subject following negation

(#318: *Måske Peter ikke kommer.*)

(#320: *Måske ikke Peter kommer.*)

(‘*Maybe Peter won’t come.*’)

(White = high score; grey = medium score; black = low score)

### 3. Discussion

The extensive investigation done within NSD on this issue in Denmark solidly confirms the previous literature. Danish indeed does not seem to allow any kind of subjects to follow negation. Concerning the two examples in (4), which somewhat surprisingly were accepted by all Danish informants, it seems plausible that the negation here forms a constituent together with the subjunctive in these cases: *hvis ikke* ‘unless’. Thus, negation does not function as a *sentential* negation in such contexts.

In the literature it is often claimed that pronominal subjects are preferred in a position preceding adverbials and negation in Norwegian (see e.g. Nilsen 1997, Svenonius 2002, Westergaard & Vangsnes

2005 and Bentzen 2009, but see also Hellan & Platzack 1995). However, with respect to both Norwegian and Swedish, the NSD data suggest that pronominal subjects in a position following negation are not all that bad. This constitutes support for the findings in Westergaard (2011). Westergaard has investigated child directed speech in the Tromsø acquisition corpus (Anderssen 2006), as well as the NoTa corpus of speakers from Oslo and she remarks that pronouns occur in a position following negation 12-15% of the time in non-subject initial main clauses (see also Østbø Munch 2013 for similar results). Thus, this word order appears to be possible. We see results supporting this finding in the Norwegian sentences introduced by *maybe* in (6). Moreover, the judgments of (5) in Sweden and Finland suggest that these speakers also allow pronominal subjects to follow negation. In contrast, this example is generally rejected in Norwegian. There might be various reasons for that. As discussed in the chapter on Object Shift, [Bentzen 2014b](#), Norwegian generally requires pronominal objects to precede negation. However, in cases where the subject itself has not shifted across negation, the object cannot do so either, as it cannot shift across the subject (unless it has moved to the clause-initial position). Thus, the fact that the pronominal object remains in situ in (5) may in itself cause the Norwegian informants to reject this example, independently of the subject's position with respect to negation.

Finally, note that in Danish, even the clauses introduced by *maybe* where the subjects precede negation were not fully accepted (6)-(7). This is not very surprising, as these clauses all display non-V2, and Danish in general prefers V2 in all matrix clauses, even those introduced by *maybe* (see [Bentzen 2014a](#)).

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**Web sites:**

Nordic Atlas of Language Structures (NALS) Journal: <http://www.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>