

On Some Mysterious Conjunctions in Danish and Their Syntactic Features.¹

1. Introduction

In this paper, I deal with the Danish conjunctions som 'as', end 'than', før 'before', førend 'before', undtagen 'except', uden 'except, unless' and foruden 'except, besides'. I will attempt to describe their syntactic and semantic characteristics in the hope that this may disentangle certain peculiar problems regarding their use in modern Standard Danish.

It is quite astonishing to foreigners attempting to learn Danish that Danes generally prefer the oblique case after these conjunctions in places where normal assumptions about cases and their proper use would have dictated the use of nominative case²:

1. Jeg er lige så høj som ham (? som han)
'I am just as tall as him (? as he).'
2. Jeg stod i køen før ham (? før han)
'I was standing in line before him (? before he).'
3. Jeg er da ikke så fed som hende (? som hun)
'I am really not as fat as her (? as she).'
4. Du kender flere semiotikere end mig (? end jeg)
'You know more semioticians than me (? than I).'
5. Anders skriver bedre på maskine end hende
(? end hun)
'Anders types better than her' (? than she)

Older well-educated native speakers insist on the nominative in such instances, whereas handbooks on usage (Hansen 1965, Galberg Jacobsen 1985) are more lenient on this

point. The problem seems to have existed for many centuries; at least Kr. Mikkelsen (1911: 241) reports that Ludvig Holberg (18th century) used the nominative in such constructions, even where the position is equivalent to a non-subject and hence should have had an oblique case. It is obvious, if we may judge from Skautrup's History of the Danish Language (Skautrup 1944-70), that there has been much confusion with respect to these cases for many centuries. I will therefore assume that the 'correct' usage of the two cases after conjunctions is more a matter of proper learning, than of a rule which has been well-established within a previous generation, but is lost since.

2. Thesis

The curious variation in case usage can be accounted for in two different ways. One possibility is to claim that the conjunctions in question are developing into prepositions and therefore require the use of the oblique case in every instance. This solution is adhered to by Aage Hansen 1965, Dansk Sprognaevn 1963-4 and 1978, by Carol Henriksen 1985 for Danish and by Vinje 1968:117 and Mørck 1983:145 for the closely related situation in Norwegian.

Another possibility is to view the problem in the light of the use of the oblique case in general. In fact, the only words taking the oblique case in Danish are a few personal pronouns, namely those that usually denote human beings. The two (den and det, both meaning 'it') that rarely refer to human beings do not take the oblique case. Now, since the oblique case is so rare, one might assume that the strict conventional use would be on the decline, and, as I mentioned above, this also seems to be the case. Following an analysis by Erik Hansen (Hansen 1972), I would like to suggest that the use of the oblique case after the conjunctions, in question may be accounted for through rules and developmental trends which are only associated with the oblique case. In other words, I would suggest that we reverse the order of facts:

instead of saying that the conjunction influences the government, I would suggest that the government actually develops on its own, and that it thereby can shed new light on the conjunction.

3. What is a preposition as opposed to a conjunction?

In order to clarify matters, I will give four possible criteria that may help us to distinguish a conjunction from a preposition.

1) Aage Hansen (Hansen 1967 III:241, 337), following the methodology of Louis Hjelmslev, uses dependency as his criterion. Both prepositions and conjunctions are referred to as leddannere 'sentence formatives'. The two classes are then kept apart through case dependency: prepositions always require the oblique case, whereas conjunctions have no such specific case requirements. Obviously, this criterion is almost circular where this problem is concerned. I will refer to it as the 'morphological criterion' in the following.

2) Paul Diderichsen (Diderichsen 1971: 70 & 73), attempting to separate morphology and syntax along the same lines as those advocated by his great source of inspiration Viggo Brøndal (esp. Brøndal 1928 and 1932), distinguishes prepositions and conjunctions in two ways: from a syntactic point of view and from what I would call a 'morpho-semantic' point of view. His syntactic criterion is the following: conjunctions serve to introduce sentences and form exocentric constructions with nominal groups; prepositions do the same, but they may also act as 'adverbs of content' in transitive verbal groups (Askedal 1982). I refer to this as the 'syntactic criterion'.

3) Diderichsen's second criterion (developed from Viggo Brøndal) is a more complicated matter. Diderichsen (1971: 71) accounts for the difference between conjunctions and prepositions by means of semantic arguments: conjunctions and prepositions both denote relation, but prepositions also

specify the particularities of the relation, whereas conjunctions relate a member to a whole³. We might try to make this very broad and imprecise semantic notion more specific, for example by combining it with the well-known criterion of unity, first baptized in case grammar by Brodda 1973.

Brodda introduces this principle (Brodda 1973: 19) after a detailed discussion of Fillmore's seminal thesis. Thus the paternity claimed by Ruus 1978:168 is an unclear matter. According to this principle,

le, no deep case occurs more than once per sentence; hence, we might distinguish conjunctions from prepositions by means of the relation of the government to the unity principle: actants introduced by prepositions adhere to this principle, whereas actants introduced by conjunctions violate it, cf. below.

Thus, Diderichsen's notion of the more specific relations in prepositions should be equivalent with single places in the semantic network surrounding a verb, whereas the relation expressed by the conjunctions between the individual and the whole reflects a doubling of already existing semantic roles.

The problematic nature of this assumption with respect to traditional distinctions between parts of speech has been pointed out to me by Lars Heltoft (personal communication). Typically, prepositions denoting time and location may introduce a type of government which similarly doubles existing deep cases:

6. Han kom efter mig (both agents)

'He came after me'

7. Ole er hos Ebbe (both locatives)

'Ole is with Ebbe.'

Thus, the 'semantic criterion' cannot be applied directly to the problems of surface grammar. I will return to this point later.

4) We should not disregard the traditional definition of conjunctions as opposed to prepositions, according to which a conjunction introduces a clause and a preposition introduces a member of the sentence. This point of view is

obviously shared by Mikkelsen (1911: 138) and by Diderichsen (1971: 200). Since simple facts contradict this criterion (the 'traditional criterion'), a traditional grammarian is forced to assume that all such apparent contradictions may be reconstructed as proper instances of the proposed rules. The fallibility of this assumption will be demonstrated later.

(Note that Diderichsen's acceptance of the 'traditional criterion' contradicts the 'syntactic criterion' established by him. The 'morpho-semantic criterion' is yet a third possibility, at least when interpreted as I would propose. Otherwise it probably agrees with either 2) or 4).)

4. Two kinds of constructions

Two of the conjunctions in question, som and ligesom, may involve two types of constructions. One of these is endocentric: the conjunction can always be omitted, and the construction may have any conceivable syntactic value. This is illustrated convincingly by Mikkelsen (1911: 139f). On the difference between som og ligesom in this situation, see Hansen (1967: 339f).

The exocentric construction is the most important one to be considered in detail here. As the term indicates, there is solidarity between the conjunction and the government. Thus, there is a parallel to most constructions of preposition and government. Below, I will refer to constructions of conjunction and government as 'conjunctive phrase' as a consequence of this parallel. The construction itself presupposes an expression of degree: either equivalence (som, ligesom) or difference (end, fjere); the latter restricted to temporal use). End frequently occurs with comparatives, whereas som in keeping with its semantic nature occurs with almost everything else. Fjere and undtagen, uden and foruden rely on a 'notion of previousness' and a 'notion of singularity', respectively. These 'notions' are usually expressed by the conjunctions themselves, whereas som and end in most

cases are redundant in relation to other morphemes expressing the same notions, som often relating to og and end relating to comparatives, as mentioned above.

I have not investigated the deeper semantic nature of these constructions and refer therefore to Mørck 1983 (with bibliography) where a detailed semantic analysis of English and Norwegian is provided.

(It should be noted with reference to Ch. 3 that some prepositions (under and over - incidentally Dan./Eng. homographs) may have the endocentric construction as well, as in:

8. Over 200 mennesker kom til kirkekoncerten
'More than 200 people came to the church concert'
9. Der var under 15 børn i børnehaven i dag
'There were less than 15 children in the kindergarten today'

Syntactically (though of course not semantically), the prepositions can be omitted here. Thus, endo-/exocentricity may not form a proper criterion for Danish.)

5. Argumentation

It is possible to demonstrate that conjunctive phrases cannot be explained as instances of reduced sentences; some of these arguments show further parallels between conjunctions and prepositions in exocentric constructions:

5.1. The absence of catalysis

Quite often it is impossible to reconstruct a clause which might have been the source of a conjunctive phrase:

10. Han har ingen andre venner end mig
'He has no other friends than me'
11. De betragtede sig som betydeligt yngre end hende
'They regarded themselves as much younger than her'

12. Hvad ser De dog i sådan en gammel millionær som jeg?
'What in the world do you see in an old millionaire like I?'
13. Hvem har opdraget ham andre end dig?
'Who has brought him up other than you?'

When such a reconstruction is blocked, the conjunctive phrase must be explained with reference to the sentence which it occurs in. The traditional way of viewing conjunctions cannot be employed here.

5.2. The absence of case congruence

The absence of case congruence illustrated by 1-5 above shows that the construction in question is not to be regarded as a sentence. The ambiguity with respect to the use of case shows, at a minimum that the meaning is unclear.

5.3. Stranded conjunctions

When bound by verbs like se, betragte, anse 'regard' som acquires the status of a verbal particle and may therefore be stranded, if the government is fronted:

14. Tjenestepige ville familien ikke se hende som /T/
'Maid the family would not see her as' (!!)
15. Hende betragtede de sig som betydeligt yngre end /T/
'Her they regarded themselves as much younger than'

The acceptability of (16) is questionable:

16. Og HAM skulle han gå til eksamen lige før!
'And HIM he had to have his exam before!'

As pointed out to me in the discussion by Goeddelieve Laureys, som is obviously a preposition in 14 and 15 in accordance with the 'syntactic' criterion. However, since this

usage is triggered by specific verbs, we may not conclude from this that all instances of conjunctions in conjunctive phrases are prepositions.

5.4. The reflexive pronoun

In Danish, reflexive and personal pronouns have complementary distribution. The reflexive 'reflects' the notional subject of the sentence through a verbal concept cf. 17-18:

17. Jonas slog sin fætter i tennis
'Jonas beat his cousin in tennis'
18. Jonas' sejr over sin fætter i tennis (kommer jeg aldrig til at acceptere)
'Jonas' victory over his cousin in tennis (I will never be able to accept)'

The reflexive never refers back to the subject from within the subject itself:

19. *Ole og sin kone tog til Rom
'Ole and his wife went to Rome'
20. Ole tog til Rom med sin kone
'Ole went to Rome with his wife'
21. Ole og hans kone tog til Rom
'Ole and his wife went to Rome'

The reflexive does not refer back from outside the domain of the verbal concept, cf 18 above, where sin refers to 'Jonas' and not to jeg; cf. also:

22. Den kvinde, Ole havde med til Rom, var hans kone
Den kvinde, Ole havde med til Rom, var sin kone
'The woman that Ole brought to Rome was his wife'

The reflexive may refer to the subject, when the verb is omitted, fx:

23. Hans mor mistede sin finger, hans far sin hånd
'His mother lost her finger, his father his hand'

All these restrictions are violated in 24-26.

24. Han er meget kønnere end sin far (???..hans far)
'He is much more handsome than his father'
25. Lise har lige så mange tænder i munden som sin søster
'Lise has just as many teeth in her mouth as her sister'
26. Karl har mistet alt undtagen sit humør
'Karl has lost everything except his humor'

If all instances of conjunctinal phrases were to be understood as reduced sentences, the use of the reflexive in this position would be questionable: and anyway, we would be outside of the domain of the sentence, and therefore the omission of the verb should not be important. Furthermore, the two first examples show constructions dependent upon the subject, hence violating the third restriction.

The arguments 5.1 - 5.4. show that the traditional criterion does not work satisfactorily for Danish.

5.5. Coordination

Mikkelsen (1911: 149), quoting authentic material, demonstrates that it is possible to coordinate conjunctinal phrases with either adverbs or prepositional phrases:

27. Hun talte med besvær og som en døvende
'She spoke with difficulty and like someone who is dying'
28. Han for pludselig og som en raket ud i gården
'He ran suddenly and like a rocket into the courtyard'

29. Han havde, med Fryd og som noget ganske nyt, lært at kjende den fortrinlige Appel (...)
'He had, with pleasure and as something completely new, gotten to know the excellent Appel (...)

Since this is possible (although my own stylistic sense reacts strongly against these examples), it illustrates a tendency to view conjunctinal phrases as having ordinary adverbial function in the sentence and to treat them accordingly.

5.6. Semantic congruence

The 'semantic criterion' established above reflects the fact that conjunctinal phrases regularly double a deep case already present in the semantic network. As mentioned above, the semantic criterion in no direct help in establishing the two sub-groupings. However, there is a helpful guideline in the fact that som and end always duplicate a deep case, whereas the others may or may not duplicate, depending upon the circumstances. This would lead to a solution where only som and end are true conjunctions, the remainder being included in the group of prepositions, where the duplication is possible, but not necessary.

(It goes without saying that the endocentric construction where the conjunction is rather some kind of modifier, and not a primary member of the construction, does not duplicate deep cases, even with som and end.)

5.7. Obligatory stress on pronouns

Since argument 5.6 above makes the case for a possible prepositional interpretation of the conjunctions doubtful, at least for som and end, we need an explanation as to why the pronouns appear in the oblique case. Such an explanation is found in Hansen 1972; the author suggests that - at least in most modern colloquial forms of spoken Danish - a pronoun

in stressed position always takes the oblique case, irrespective of grammatical relations (Hansen 1972: 4). But how can we be sure that the pronoun following a conjunction is always stressed?

One possibility (and indeed the only one I sketched at the conference) is to assume that conjunctive phrases are always the focus of the sentence. It is obviously the case that the conjunctive phrase is always stressed and always towards the end of the sentence. Furthermore, we have other situations in Danish where the oblique case is mandatory, even though it violates the relation between subjecthood and nominative:

30. Det ver mig, der dræbte Franz Liszt

'It was me that killed Franz Liszt'

31. "Hvem leder afdelingen?" - "Mig!"

'Who is leading the section? - me'

In these cases, the change in case form is clearly motivated through the association of these constructions with a regular focusing pattern. Hansen 1965: 100 remarks that the nominative case is mostly anaphoric, whereas the oblique case is mostly demonstrative; in other words, a clear indication of some kind of redistribution of semantic content in the rudimentary case system.

If we try to reconstruct a sentence from a conjunctive phrase, we find that what can be added is unstressed, cf.:

32. Jeg rejste en anden vej end min bror rejste

'I travelled another way than my brother travelled'

Since such a sentence is at any rate incomplete, lacking representation of the member of the supersentence containing the conjunctive phrase or its derived clause, we find that government is regularly the only possible non-anaphoric rudiment in the construction, and hence the only candidate for focus.

Yet another possibility is to assume that there are more mechanical rules of stress ascription, as in Hansen & Lund 1983. This is more convenient, if we want to avoid direct semantic/pragmatic implications in the description. I would like to conclude with a brief outline of a possible explanation along these lines.

From Hansen & Lund (1983: 49) we can posit this scheme for stress distribution in prepositional phrases:

preposition	government
1) unstressed	stressed
2) stressed	unstressed/stressed

In other words, a prepositional phrase in Danish may not be totally unstressed, at least one of its parts must be stressed. Som and end are always unstressed (Hansen & Lund 1983:46) and the rest of the group may be unstressed (Hansen & Lund 1983:47); thus, if we assume that the stress pattern in conjunctive phrases follows the rules of prepositional phrases by analogy, the obligatory lack of stress on som and end forces the government to be stressed. This would account for the stress on the pronoun and thus according to the above-mentioned rule in Hansen 1972 lead to an invariable use of the oblique case in conjunctive phrases.

However, the mystifying fact here is that pronouns in a prepositional phrase are quite frequently unstressed:

33. Jeg gør det gerne for ham

'I do it willingly for him'

cp.

34. Jeg gør det gerne for fru 'Olsen

'I do it willingly for Mrs. Olsen'

Thus we need an explanation as to why som and end are always unstressed - or why the pronouns are always stressed in conjunctive phrases! An explanation for the unstressed nature of the conjunctions might be their relative redundant-

cy in relation to elements, which are always notionally present elsewhere in the sentence. Otherwise, the focus distribution is the only possibility, as discussed above.

6. Conclusion

I have tried to shed some light on the Danish conjunctions and the phrases they form in order to account for certain peculiarities concerning the use of case in such constructions. I have tried to show that the puzzling use of the case system is independent of word class - in other words that this construction cannot be taken as evidence for a development of the conjunctions in question into prepositions. Whether we choose the one or the other explanation given in 5.7 above is of no matter, we find that both solutions will work, irrespective of the word class we put som, end etc. into. (Obviously, the 'correct' usage, with nominative in subjects, blocks interpretation as prepositions, but as I have said, this usage is most probably artificial, a product of higher education.)

If we return to the criteria given above in section 3, we find that the 'morphological criterion' used to distinguish prepositions from conjunctions is circular in relation to this problem and therefore hardly of any assistance. The second criterion may be difficult to apply as well; as we have seen in 5.3., som may appear as a verbal particle and thus fit the definition of a preposition according to this criterion. It is remarkable that whereas som is usually unstressed (Hansen & Lund 1983:46) it is obviously stressed in 14-15 above. This is also in accord with Hansen & Lund 1983, 46A.

Therefore, the only criteria that actually DO distinguish prepositions and conjunctions in Danish are the 'morpho-semantic criterion' and the 'traditional criterion'. Arguments 5.1 - 4. show the relatively weak status of the 'traditional criterion', which leaves us with the semantic criterion.

Does this mean that these two traditional parts of speech have collapsed in Danish? I do not think so. The sentence is a complicated phenomenon working on several levels of the linguistic system at the same time; on the semantic level, we deal with idealized actions implicating only such actants that are necessary, whereas on a syntactico-pragmatic level we convert these idealized actions into speech acts and thereby may need duplications of certain positions of the actantial system. In this way it is certainly reasonable that only morpho-semantic criteria work, since this is the only level where the distinction actually does make sense.

Footnotes

- 1 This paper was originally read at the '6th Conference of Scandinavian and General Linguistics', Helsinki (Finland) 186h - 22nd August 1986, but did not reach the proceedings.
I am indebted to Carol Henriksen, ph. D., Copenhagen, for comments on my English. Whatever errors still left is of course my own responsibility.
- 2 The majority of the quotations in my text derive from examples given in Mikkelsen 1911, Hansen 1965 and Hansen 1967.
- 3 Diderichsen 1971:71: "Konjunktionere betegner ligesom Verbel og Præpositioner Forhold, men gør det med særligt Hensyn til den Maade, hvorpaa et Led indordnes i et Hele, og uden den Angivelse af Forholdets specielle Art, som finder Udtryk i Præpositionerne."

References

- Askedal, John Ole 1982. Om Prepositioners Syntaktiske Status i de Skaalte "Transitive Verbalgrupper" i Norsk. In Nordic Journal of Linguistic 5.
- Brodde, Benny 1973. (K)Overta Kasus i Svenskan = Papers from the Institute of Linguistics at the University of Stockholm 18.

- Brøndal, Viggo 1928: Ordklasserne. København: C.E. Gads Forlag.
- Brøndal, Viggo 1932: Morfologi og Syntax = Festskrift fra Københavns Universitet 1932.
- Dansk Sprognavn 1963-4 & 1978: Årsberetning (Annual Report) København: Gyldendal.
- Diderichsen, Paul 1971: Elementær dansk Grammatik. København: Gyldendal, 2nd edition (1st edition 1946)
- Galberg Jacobsen, H. 1985: Erhvervsdansk 3. København: Schønberg.
- Hansen, Aage 1965: Vort vanskelige Sprog. København: Grafisk Forlag (1st edition 1961).
- Hansen, Aage 1967: Moderne Dansk I-III. København: Grafisk Forlag.
- Hansen, Erik 1972: Dr. Jekyll & mr. Hyde i dansk Grammatik. In: Papir. Bunde I, 4 (Pre-print)
- Hansen, Erik & Lund, Jørn 1983: Sæt Tryk På! København: Lærforeningernes Materialeudvalg.
- Henriksen, Caroline C. 1985: Socialrigtighed, sprogrigtighed og skriftsprogsnormering - i almindelighed og i Danmark. In Språk og samfunn i Norden etter 1945 = Nordisk Språksekretariats Rapporter 5. Oslo.
- Mikkelsen, Kr. 1911: Dansk Ordføjningslære. 2nd edition (eds. Hansen, Glismann, Togeby, Heltoft) København: Hans Reitzels Forlag 1976.
- Mørck, Endre 1983: Sammenlikningssetninger og sammenlikningsledd (=Norskseksjonen: Skrifter 1983:1). Agder Distrikthøgskole.
- Ruuv, Hanne 1978: Sproglig Betydningsanalyse. In Nydanske Studier 10/11. København: Akademisk Forlag.
- Skautrup, Peter 1944 - 70: Det danske Sprogs Historie. I-IV. København: D.S.L. - Gyldendal.
- Vinje, Finn Erik 1968: Moderne Norsk. Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co.