

# Topics in Comparative Scandinavian and Germanic Syntax

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## 2a. Intro: Why German is not SVO, but SOV with verb second

(Based on Vikner 2019)

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### 1. Is German SVO or SOV?

The distinction between SVO- and SOV-languages goes back to Greenberg's (1963, 109) discussion of "basic word order", by which Greenberg means the order of the **subject**, the **verb** and the **object**. Establishing the basic word order of a particular language is not as easy as it may sound. Danish, e.g., allows at least four different orders:



Taking the basic order to be **SVO**

## (4) Main clauses (subject-initial)

|    |                                                                                                               |                                                          |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| a. | Jürg <u>hält</u> gerade einen Vortrag.<br><i>Jürg gives just now a talk</i>                                   | no movement required                                     |
| b. | Jürg hat ___ gestern einen Vortrag <u>gehalten</u> .<br><i>Jürg has yesterday a talk given</i>                | past participle<br>moved to the right                    |
| c. | Jürg wird ___ morgen einen Vortrag <u>halten</u> .<br><i>Jürg will tomorrow a talk give</i>                   | infinitive<br>moved to the right                         |
| d. | Jürg wird ___ ___ morgen einen Vortrag <u>gehalten haben</u> .<br><i>Jürg will tomorrow a talk given have</i> | past participle + infinitive<br>both moved to the right  |
| e. | Jürg fängt ___ gerade einen Vortrag <u>an</u> .<br><i>Jürg begins just now a talk PRT</i>                     | separable prefix<br>both moved to the right              |
| f. | Jürg wird ___ ___ morgen einen Vortrag <u>anfangen</u> .<br><i>Jürg will tomorrow a talk PRT-begin</i>        | separable prefix + infinitive<br>both moved to the right |

## (5) Embedded clauses

|    |                                                                                                                                        |                                                                          |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| a. | ... weil Jürg ___ gerade einen Vortrag <u>hält</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg just now a talk gives</i>                                  | finite verb<br>moved to the right                                        |
| b. | ... weil Jürg ___ ___ gestern einen Vortrag <u>gehalten hat</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg yesterday a talk given has</i>                | past participle + finite verb<br>both moved to the right                 |
| c. | ... weil Jürg ___ ___ morgen einen Vortrag <u>halten wird</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg tomorrow a talk give will</i>                   | infinitive + finite verb<br>both moved to the right                      |
| d. | ... weil Jürg ___ ___ ___ morgen einen Vortrag <u>gehalten haben wird</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg tomorrow a talk given have will</i> | past participle + infinitive<br>+ finite verb<br>all moved to the right  |
| e. | ... weil Jürg ___ ___ gerade einen Vortrag <u>anfängt</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg just now a talk PRT-begins</i>                      | separable prefix + finite verb<br>both moved to the right                |
| f. | ... weil Jürg ___ ___ ___ morgen einen Vortrag <u>anfangen wird</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg tomorrow a talk PRT-begin will</i>        | separable prefix + infinitive<br>+ finite verb<br>all moved to the right |

## (6) Non-subject-initial main clauses

|    |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                        |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| a. | <u>Gestern</u> <u>hat</u> Jürg ___ ___ einen Vortrag <u>gehalten</u> .<br><i>Yesterday has Jürg a talk given</i>     | adverbial moved to the left<br>+ finite verb moved to the left<br>+ past participle moved to the right |
| b. | <u>Einen Vortrag</u> <u>hat</u> Jürg ___ ___ gestern ___ <u>gehalten</u> .<br><i>A talk has Jürg yesterday given</i> | object moved to the left<br>+ finite verb moved to the left<br>+ past participle moved to the right    |

To get from a basic SVO-order to the various word orders actually found in German, a considerable number of different movements have to be assumed. (4) shows that not only do all non-finite verbal forms (and separable prefixes = separable verb particles) have to be moved to the right in main clauses (as stated explicitly in e.g. Lass 1987, 328), but it also has to be assured that all of these non-finite verbal forms (and separable prefixes) occur in the mirror image order of the one they would have had if they had not moved as seen from their order in e.g. Danish or English:

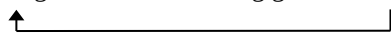
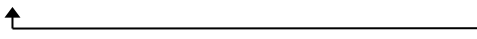
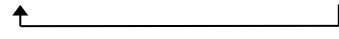
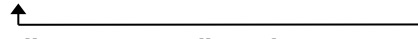
- (7) Ge. a. Das Licht muss aus<sub>3</sub>gegangen<sub>2</sub> sein<sub>1</sub>.  
 Da. b. Lyset må være<sub>1</sub> gået<sub>2</sub> ud<sub>3</sub>.  
 En. c. The light must have<sub>1</sub> gone<sub>2</sub> out<sub>3</sub>.

The exact same<sup>1</sup> is true of embedded clauses, except that here also the finite verb would have to be moved to the right, as seen in (5). Notice also that even though a basic SVO-order has the verb before the object, it is nevertheless necessary to assume a movement that moves a finite verb to the **left** to account for (6) **in addition to** a movement that moves a finite verb to the **right** to account for (5).

Consider now how relatively simple the derivation is if the basic order is taken to be SOV (adapted from Wöllstein-Leisten et al. 1997, 28–32; and Vikner 2019, and also 2001, 87–124, and 2005):

### Taking the basic order to be **SOV**

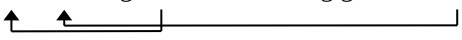
#### (7) Subject-initial main clauses - same data as (4)

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                               |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. | Jürg <u>hält</u> gerade einen Vortrag ____.<br><br><i>Jürg gives just now a talk</i>                            | finite verb moved to the left |
| b. | Jürg <u>hat</u> gestern einen Vortrag gehalten ____.<br><br><i>Jürg has yesterday a talk given</i>              | finite verb moved to the left |
| c. | Jürg <u>wird</u> morgen einen Vortrag halten ____.<br><br><i>Jürg will tomorrow a talk give</i>                 | finite verb moved to the left |
| d. | Jürg <u>wird</u> morgen einen Vortrag gehalten haben ____.<br><br><i>Jürg will tomorrow a talk given have</i> | finite verb moved to the left |
| e. | Jürg <u>fängt</u> gerade einen Vortrag an ____.<br><br><i>Jürg begins just now a talk PRT</i>                 | finite verb moved to the left |
| f. | Jürg <u>wird</u> morgen einen Vortrag anfangen ____.<br><br><i>Jürg will tomorrow a talk PRT-begin</i>        | finite verb moved to the left |

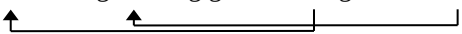
#### (8) Embedded clauses - same data as (5)

|    |                                                                                                                            |                      |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| a. | ... weil Jürg gerade einen Vortrag <u>hält</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg just now a talk gives</i>                          | no movement required |
| b. | ... weil Jürg gestern einen Vortrag gehalten <u>hat</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg yesterday a talk given has</i>            | no movement required |
| c. | ... weil Jürg morgen einen Vortrag halten <u>wird</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg tomorrow a talk give will</i>               | no movement required |
| d. | ... weil Jürg morgen einen Vortrag gehalten haben <u>wird</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg tomorrow a talk given have will</i> | no movement required |
| e. | ... weil Jürg gerade einen Vortrag <u>anfängt</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg just now a talk PRT-begins</i>                  | no movement required |
| f. | ... weil Jürg morgen einen Vortrag anfangen <u>wird</u> .<br><i>... because Jürg tomorrow a talk PRT-begin will</i>        | no movement required |

#### (9) Non-subject-initial main clauses - same data as (6)

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| a. | <u>Gestern</u> <u>hat</u> Jürg ____ einen Vortrag gehalten ____.<br><br><i>Yesterday has Jürg a talk given</i> | adverbial moved to the left<br>+ finite verb moved to the left |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|

<sup>1</sup> Given that a number of different verbal forms plus a separable prefix may move, an answer also has to be found (or a rule has to be formulated) why they all have to move in (4), with only one notable exception: the finite verb. If it is possible to move only *gehalten* in (4)b, why is it not possible to move only *gehalten* in (4)d? Similarly, if it is possible to move only *an* in (4)e, why is it not possible to move only *an* in (4)f?

|    |                                                                                   |                                                             |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| b. | Einen Vortrag <u>hat</u> Jürg gestern ____ gehalten ____.                         | object moved to the left<br>+ finite verb moved to the left |
|    |  |                                                             |
|    | <i>A talk has Jürg yesterday given</i>                                            |                                                             |

To get from a basic SOV-order to the various word orders actually found in German, a relatively small number of different movements will have to be assumed. Notice e.g. that a finite verb is only ever moved to the left, (7) and (9), never to the right, and that no other verbal forms or separable prefixes need to move to account for the data in (7) and (9).

It would thus seem that we can find good theoretical reasons for taking seriously the difference shown in (2)-(3) and consequently take German (and Dutch, Afrikaans, Frisian, and Old English) to be SOV-languages, not SVO. Let us now move on to some further considerations.

## 2. Aux-VP vs. VP-aux across Germanic

One advantage of making a distinction between Scandinavian and English as **SVO** and Dutch, Afrikaans, Frisian, German and Old English as **SOV** is that it allows a number of further generalisations to be made. One such generalisation is that Germanic SVO-languages always put the finite auxiliary verb, *have*, to the left of the verb phrase in embedded clauses, (10), whereas Germanic SOV-languages most often (but not exclusively) put the finite auxiliary verb to the right of the verb phrase in embedded clauses, (11):

| (10) SVO |           |               |     | <u>aux</u>  | <u>verb phrase</u> |
|----------|-----------|---------------|-----|-------------|--------------------|
| a.       | Danish    | ... fordi     | jeg | <b>har</b>  | læst bogen.        |
| b.       | Faroese   | ... av tí at  | eg  | <b>havi</b> | lisið bókina.      |
| c.       | Icelandic | ... af því að | ég  | <b>hef</b>  | lesið bókina.      |
| d.       | English   | ... because   | I   | <b>have</b> | read the book.     |

| (11) SOV |             |             |     | <u>verb phrase</u> | <u>aux</u>   |
|----------|-------------|-------------|-----|--------------------|--------------|
| a.       | Dutch       | ... omdat   | ik  | het boek gelezen   | <b>heb.</b>  |
| b.       | Afrikaans   | ... omdat   | ek  | die boek gelees    | <b>het.</b>  |
| c.       | Frisian     | ... om't    | ik  | it boekje lêzen    | <b>ha.</b>   |
| d.       | German      | ... weil    | ich | das Buch gelesen   | <b>habe.</b> |
| e.       | Old English | ... forðan  | ic  | þa boc gereded     | <b>habe.</b> |
|          |             | ... because | I   | the book read      | have         |

This can be formulated as follows:

- (12) **SVO**-languages only have **aux-VP**,  
whereas only **SOV**-languages can have **VP-aux**.

From this we can e.g. derive the prediction that if a Germanic language has **VO**-order as in English (i.e. *read* before *the book*), it will **not** have **VP-aux** order (i.e. *read the book* before *have*). In other words, we predict that no Germanic language can have the order ... *because I read the book have*.

(This is then something that a language-acquiring child can take for granted and not have to spend time and energy on.)

### 3. Verb second (V2)

A potential problem with this difference in base order between German and Danish is that it might now seem as if these two languages are much more different than they "really" are. However, even though this analysis says that they have different base orders (German is SOV, Danish SVO), they still have other central properties in common, e.g. V2: As shown in for Danish in (13) and for German in (14), the finite verb in main clauses in both languages moves into the second position (= C°) and e.g. the object or an adverbial (or maybe even the subject) moves into the first position (= CP-spec).

#### (13) Danish

|    | ①                                                | ②                                      | V O                                                                                            | Derivation                           |
|----|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. |                                                  | At<br><i>That</i>                      | Sten vil holde et foredrag i morgen, ...<br><i>Sten will give a talk tomorrow, ...</i>         | no movements                         |
| b. |                                                  | <u>Vil</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>Will</i> | Sten ____ <sub>2</sub> holde et foredrag i morgen?<br><i>Sten give a talk tomorrow?</i>        | finite verb to ②                     |
| c. | <u>I morgen</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>Tomorrow</i>  | <u>vil</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>will</i> | Sten ____ <sub>2</sub> holde et foredrag ____ <sub>1</sub> .<br><i>Sten give a talk</i>        | adverbial to ① +<br>finite verb to ② |
| d. | <u>Et foredrag</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>A talk</i> | <u>vil</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>will</i> | Sten ____ <sub>2</sub> holde ____ <sub>1</sub> i morgen.<br><i>Sten give tomorrow</i>          | object to ① +<br>finite verb to ②    |
| e. | <u>Sten</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>Sten</i>          | <u>vil</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>will</i> | ____ <sub>1</sub> ____ <sub>2</sub> holde et foredrag i morgen.<br><i>give a talk tomorrow</i> | subject to ① +<br>finite verb to ②   |

#### (14) German

|    | ①                                                  | ②                                       | O V                                                                                              | Derivation                           |                   |
|----|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| a. |                                                    | Dass<br><i>That</i>                     | Jürg morgen einen Vortrag halten wird, ...<br><i>Jürg tomorrow a talk give will, ...</i>         | no movements                         | ≈ (13)a           |
| b. |                                                    | <u>Wird</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>Will</i> | Jürg morgen einen Vortrag halten ____ <sub>2</sub> ?<br><i>Jürg tomorrow a talk give ?</i>       | finite verb to ②                     | ≈ (13)b           |
| c. | <u>Morgen</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>Tomorrow</i>      | <u>wird</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>will</i> | Jürg ____ <sub>1</sub> einen Vortrag halten ____ <sub>2</sub> .<br><i>Jürg a talk give</i>       | adverbial to ① +<br>finite verb to ② | ≈ (13)c<br>& (9)a |
| d. | <u>Einen Vortrag</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>A talk</i> | <u>wird</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>will</i> | Jürg morgen ____ <sub>1</sub> halten ____ <sub>2</sub> .<br><i>Jürg tomorrow give</i>            | object to ① +<br>finite verb to ②    | ≈ (13)d<br>& (9)b |
| e. | <u>Jürg</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>Jürg</i>            | <u>wird</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>will</i> | ____ <sub>1</sub> morgen einen Vortrag halten ____ <sub>2</sub> .<br><i>tomorrow a talk give</i> | subject to ① +<br>finite verb to ②   | ≈ (13)e           |

It would therefore seem preferable to suggest the typological classification that both Danish and German are V2, even though Danish is SVO and German SOV. On the other hand, Danish and English have in common that they are both SVO, even though Danish is V2 and English is not V2, as can be seen from the fact that the English version of e.g. (13)c/(14)c would not have the finite verb in the second position in front of the subject, but in the third position after the subject:

(15) En. Tomorrow, Caroline will give a talk.

## 4. Conclusion

(16)

|            | +V2                  | -V2                           |
|------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>SVO</b> | Danish, Swedish, ... | English, French, ...          |
| <b>SOV</b> | German, Dutch, ...   | Japanese, Hindi, Turkish, ... |

(17)

| Languages                        | Vikner (2019)<br>and many others* | WALS<br>(Dryer 2011) | Greenberg (1963),<br>Whaley (1997) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Danish (13),<br>Swedish, ...     | <b>SVO with V2</b>                | SVO                  | SVO                                |
| English (15),<br>French, ...     | <b>SVO without V2</b>             | SVO                  | SVO                                |
| German (14),<br>Dutch, ...       | <b>SOV with V2</b>                | no dominant<br>order | SVO                                |
| Japanese, Hindi,<br>Turkish, ... | <b>SOV without V2</b>             | SOV                  | SOV                                |

\* Bach (1962), Bierwisch (1963), Koster (1975), ... , Haider (2010, 2013), ...

However, often V2 completely obscures the OV-VO-difference, cf. that (18)b-e and (19)b-e sound completely parallel, even though they are derived from respectively a VO and an OV basic order (as opposed to in (13)/(14), there are no non-finite verbs in (18)/(19)):

(18) Danish

|    | ①                                                | ②                                          | V O                                                                           | Derivation                           |
|----|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. |                                                  | At<br><i>That</i>                          | Sten måske holder et foredrag, ...<br><i>Sten maybe gives a talk, , ...</i>   | no movements                         |
| b. |                                                  | <u>Holder</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>Gives</i> | Sten måske ____ <sub>2</sub> et foredrag?<br><i>Sten maybe a talk?</i>        | finite verb to ②                     |
| c. | <u>Måske</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>Maybe</i>        | <u>holder</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>gives</i> | Sten ____ <sub>1</sub> ____ <sub>2</sub> et foredrag.<br><i>Sten a talk</i>   | adverbial to ① +<br>finite verb to ② |
| d. | <u>Et foredrag</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>A talk</i> | <u>holder</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>gives</i> | Sten måske ____ <sub>2</sub> ____ <sub>1</sub> .<br><i>Sten maybe</i>         | object to ① +<br>finite verb to ②    |
| e. | <u>Sten</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>Sten</i>          | <u>holder</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>gives</i> | ____ <sub>1</sub> måske ____ <sub>2</sub> et foredrag.<br><i>maybe a talk</i> | subject to ① +<br>finite verb to ②   |

(19) German

|    | ①                                                  | ②                                        | O V                                                                                   | Derivation                           |
|----|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. |                                                    | Dass<br><i>That</i>                      | Jürg vielleicht einen Vortrag hält, ...<br><i>Jürg maybe a talk gives, ...</i>        | no movements                         |
| b. |                                                    | <u>Hält</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>Gives</i> | Jürg vielleicht einen Vortrag ____ <sub>2</sub> .?<br><i>Jürg maybe a talk ?</i>      | finite verb to ②                     |
| c. | <u>Vielleicht</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>Maybe</i>     | <u>hält</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>gives</i> | Jürg ____ <sub>1</sub> einen Vortrag ____ <sub>2</sub> .<br><i>Jürg a talk</i>        | adverbial to ① +<br>finite verb to ② |
| d. | <u>Einen Vortrag</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>A talk</i> | <u>hält</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>gives</i> | Jürg vielleicht ____ <sub>1</sub> ____ <sub>2</sub> .<br><i>Jürg maybe</i>            | object to ① +<br>finite verb to ②    |
| e. | <u>Jürg</u> <sub>1</sub><br><i>Jürg</i>            | <u>hält</u> <sub>2</sub><br><i>gives</i> | ____ <sub>1</sub> vielleicht einen Vortrag ____ <sub>2</sub> .<br><i>maybe a talk</i> | subject to ① +<br>finite verb to ②   |

≈ (18)a

≈ (18)b

≈ (18)c

≈ (18)d

≈ (18)e

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