A GENTLE INTRODUCTION TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF GRAMMAR

WITH ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES FROM ENGLISH AND DANISH

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SECTION 1: Preliminaries

1.1. Introducing the course

1.1.1. About this book

Though I draw on material from both English and Danish, the book is not to be viewed as an English grammar nor as a Danish grammar. Instead it aims at upgrading the reader's grammatical literacy by focussing on basic terminology and by investigating some of the current issues in grammar and general linguistics – using concrete data from English and Danish. Why these two languages?

- English, because it is the author's native language and because English grammar has been his primary area of teaching and research for more than three decades.

- Danish, because the primary readership is intended to be teachers and students affiliated with all levels of the Danish educational system.

Ideally, readers should profit by improving their understanding of grammar in general, while at the same time adding to their knowledge of (corners of) English and Danish grammar. Furthermore, by making use of data from two languages, the book provides a comparative and contrastive element which yields an additional perspective on both linguistic data and theory.

Hopefully, readers will begin to notice some benefits from the book when they peruse one or more of the standard grammar books for Danish or any foreign language – simply as a result of becoming more familiar with grammatical terminology and grammatical analysis. I hope, too, that students at all levels will be able to sense that teacher presentations and classroom discussions become more meaningful. This will have a cumulative effect on their learning curve, as understanding in given areas promotes understanding in new areas.

1.1.1.1. Integration with the VISL website

I should stress that this book is but a pale reflection of its electronic counterpart – a highly interactive web-book freely accessible on the Internet at the following address:

visl.sdu.dk

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By integrating the book with the VISL website (VISL = Visual Interactive Syntax Learning; see Section 2 for a fuller description of the VISL website), the book becomes more than a "book" – it becomes a full-fledged electronic "course", incorporating from the start a number of useful and exciting features, including the following:

- You gain access to a highly advanced and sophisticated IT-system, ensuring a maximum of interactive participation.

- You can move through the course at your own pace and tailor your progress to your own strengths and weaknesses.

- You receive immediate feedback on your performance.

- The course incorporates a high degree of "edutainment" (= education + entertainment). You have at your fingertips a number of language games and quizzes – by means of which you can test your knowledge of grammar as it increases throughout the course.

- You have the chance to compete worldwide for high scores in many of the games.

- There is constant variation in the course materials. A fundamental principle of the VISL system is that monotonous repetition should be avoided. Generally speaking, this means that each time you select a particular language game or quiz, the task will be different. Thus it is knowledge rather than a good memory that is the key factor behind a successful performance.

- You have access to a wide choice of languages. The VISL site currently provides materials for 21 different languages – Arabic, Bosnian, Danish, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Finnish, French, German, Greek (both ancient and modern), Italian, Japanese, Latin, Latvian, Norwegian (both bokmål and nynorsk), Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish.

1.1.1.2 The advantage of a single uniform system of symbols and terminology

While all these features offer clear advantages to the course participant, the most significant advantage of tapping into VISL, in my view, is the following:

Grammar is simplified by being codified in one uniform system. VISL uses the same system of analysis, the same terminology, and selects from the same set of symbols for all 21 languages currently available at the website. This means that once you have mastered the system for e.g. English, you are ready to apply it to any of the other VISL languages. The one exception is Arabic, whose grammatical tradition is radically different from that of the other VISL languages.

1.1.1.3. A printed book has its own advantages

While I strongly recommend using the electronic version of this text, since that will maximize the interactive aspect of the course, it cannot be denied that the more traditional book form also has a number of advantages: its use is independent of energy sources and modern technology, you can read it in bed, in the garden, or at the beach (without fear of getting sand in the keyboard), you can give it to friends on special occasions, you can use a highlighter to mark up particular passages, you can add marginal notes, you can ask the author to autograph your copy, etc.

1.1.1.4. The need for reform in language teaching throughout the Danish education system

In an unusually forthright and outspoken article entitled **"Fra sprogfag til sprogkompetence – nødvendige perspektiver for det danske uddannelsessystem"** (="From language discipline to language competence"), Niels Iversen, Associate Professor (="lektor") at the Institute for Curriculum Research, the Danish University of Education (="**Danmarks Paedagogiske Universitet**") severely criticizes the way language teaching is currently carried out in the Danish school system.

It is rare that an author expresses his opinion so openly and so clearly. Here are a few excerpts that seem most directly relevant to reforming the existing language program.

* * * * *

The teacher training programs are no longer in tune with the levels of teaching they are supposed to serve; they are not professional enough. This is due to the fact that Denmark has no clear language policy, – with the result that the country suffers from a lack of connection and cohesion among the various levels. (p. 1)

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It is striking how modest the difference is between the formulated goals for the grade school diploma on the one hand and for a university degree on the oyher. (p. 1)

* * * * *

The teacher training programs (which also involve the university) no longer meet the demands of the education system. (p. 2)

* * * * *

It seems to be a tradition in Denmark that the staff who teach language courses view language acquisition as an irritating hindrance. Language teaching can be described in terms of the traditional adventure paradigm: a long journey with obstacles and monsters that prevent the young hero from reaching the treasure/ maiden. The language aspect is undervalued despite – or perhaps just because – it is the main issue! Language disciplines are treated increasingly as disciplines where various topics are discussed, whereas the focus should be on overcoming specific difficulties in the development of the discursive skills needed for such discourse. In language disciplines expression *is* the content. (p. 3)

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The symbiosis between secondary education and the university has evaporated. The current institutional profiles arise from a form of society long gone. It is odd to witness how little the Danish education system has kept up with developments in the rest of society. The situation is serious for language disciplines – not least the linguistic competence which requires such a long time to develop. (p. 3)

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When budget pressures arise within the language disciplines, it is generally the language courses which suffer. They are easy targets, undervalued as they are by most university teachers. These courses are typically not well integrated in basic research, which in itself is a serious mistake. This is due, among other things, to the fact that the current staff has very little practical experience from the secondary schools. They are recruited within a closed circuit. Their education is becoming poorer and poorer. Having served as an external examiner at university level for many years, I can conclude that many graduates simply have not reached a linguistic level that corresponds to the level of competence which quite reasonably is required. Everybody knows that this is true, but nobody will say it publicly. This development offers a real threat to foreign language competence. It is not simply a question of funding. (p. 4)

* * * * *

I am continually amazed that the linguistic competence of future teachers is

still based on an education program which is becoming notoriously poorer and poorer. . . Future language teachers should ideally be educated linguistically in a region where the target language is spoken by native speakers. Research has shown that this is the optimal context. It is absurd that the linguistic training of young Danes is based on Danish teachers who are not linguistically competent. Unfortunately this generalisation holds throughout the education system. There are far too many badly trained language teachers. And the situation is getting worse with the advent of information technology. (p. 4)

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My own experience as a university teacher of English confirms much of what Niels Iversen is saying. I would like to add an additional variable, however: "fear".

1.1.1.5. Fear of grammar

I have been teaching courses in English grammar and general linguistics at university level since coming to Denmark in 1971, and – unfortunately – I believe the following claim is justified: most of my new students each year feel that no one could seriously associate the word *wonderful* with the word *grammar* (as I have done in the book title). But I *am* serious, and I hope that this web-course will help justify my claim.

On the positive side, I have experienced that there is usually a small minority of new students who need no convincing at the outset, and I like to believe that by the end of my university course, a few of the other students have come around to my view.

An interesting question to raise at this point is this: Where does this fear of grammar come from? The answer can only be that like the taste for snaps, licorice, coffee, or peanut butter, it has been acquired – acquired during the education process itself. The fear represents a kind of negative education. Part of the problem, I believe, is that students are exposed to such a variety of terminology, symbols, systems and teaching methods that they find it difficult to catch sight of any common ground – any general principles which lie at the core of language structure, cutting across languages. Another variable is no doubt the lowering of standards for admission to the English degree program at the university. When I came to Denmark in 1971, I was impressed by the fact that successful applicants not only had to have a relatively high grade-point average from secondary school – they also had to document a solid knowledge of Latin ("Den store latinprøve") as well as competence in at least two foreign languages other than English. Today the only real requirement is a secondary school diploma**.**

1.1.1.6. In-text references

There are basically three standard techniques for citing sources in connection with quotations or to give credit for important insights: footnotes, end notes and in-text notes. The basic difference is one of location – footnotes appear at the bottom of the given page, endnotes appear at the end of a structural unit (typically the given chapter or the book itself), in-text notes appear as soon as possible in the text itself. I shall be making extensive use of in-text notes, since they are concise, precise and extremely reader-friendly (no need to hunt for them).

Since I suspect that some readers are unfamiliar with this technique, I shall provide an example here and then comment on it.

It is customary today to distinguish between **DESCRIPTIVE** and **PRESCRIPTIVE** grammars. As Palmer (1986:15) remarks:

> . . .*the basic mistake is viewing grammar as a set of normative rules – rules that tell us how we ought to speak and write. It is important incidentally to stress the word 'normative', since, as we shall see later, one theoretical model of grammar makes extensive use of rules; these will prove, however, to be 'descriptive' rules (rules that describe the language), not prescriptive rules (rules that prescribe the language). That is, they will be rules that state what we in fact say, not rules that state what we ought to say.*

In this example, the in-text note is the reference "Palmer (1986:15)". Here Palmer 1986 must point to a unique entry in the bibliography, while the number 15 indicates the page number where the quotation can be found. Palmer's book is listed in the bibiography (or rather, References) as follows:

Palmer, Frank. Grammar. *Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England. 2nd edition 1984   (1st edition 1971).*

Readers now have all the information they need to find the Palmer quotation for themselves.

1.2. About the author

John M. Dienhart was born in the United States. He took his B.A. at Yale University (mathematics), after which he worked as a computer programmer for IBM. This was followed by graduate studies at Arizona State University (M.A., anthropology) and subsequently at the University of Wisconsin – Madison (M.A., linguistics). He came to Denmark in 1971 and is currently Associate Professor ("lektor") of English at the University of Southern Denmark), where he teaches courses in English grammar, American English phonetics, English-Danish translation, contrastive grammar (English, Danish, German), the language of poetry, and the language of humor. He has published articles in each of these areas and is co-author of books on English grammar (*An Introduction to English Sentence Analysis*) and American phonetics (*American English Pronunciation*). In 1996 he helped inaugurate the VISL project and has headed the English VISL group ever since. In this capacity, he has been an active participant in a number of VISL-related partnerships with a wide range of Danish educational institutions:

1.2.1. The author's current affiliations with various levels of the Danish education system

I am currently a member of two committees appointed by the Danish Ministry of Education to revise the curriculum for business English (HHX) and technical English (HTX). In addition, I am a member of various consortia whose task it is to develop new electronic teaching materials in connection with the VISL website for English and Danish for the following institutions: primary school, secondary school, teacher training colleges, university. Another consortium (of which I am a member) has just submitted an application to the Ministry for funding to design course materials for implementing the Ministry's new guidelines for reforming language teaching in the secondary school system – not least through a new course whose Danish title is "Almen Sprogforståelse".

Should funding be granted for this project, it is my task to deliver the new course materials before the end of this year (2004), so that the course can be offered around the country starting January 2005 – through the auspices of the various "Amtscentre". This is the main motivation for WWG. However, I hope that the materials will also be of use in all the other projects I am engaged in at the moment. This imposes major demands on content and flexibility. In other words, what is needed is what Niels Iversen is calling for – namely, a clear and orderly progression from primary school through secondary school to university level. Such a progression has long been the norm in e.g. the natural sciences and mathematics. In the case of the latter subject, students in primary schools across the country are introduced at a very early age to the joys and mysteries of elementary arithmetic. The skills they acquire in this area are then honed and extended in subsequent classes and

brought to play in related subjects such as algebra, geometry, probability theory, statistics and calculus. A superb example of an internet site designed along these lines is the following

http://www.aaamath.com/

The question to be addressed now is this: How does one set up a corresponding progression in the field of language teaching? This is one of the major problems that I believe WWG resolves – or, at the very least, contributes significant solutions to. I have concluded that there are three natural and logical ways to progress from primary school to university within this area:

- a subdivision according to topic e.g.:

  o the determination of word class

  o the determination of function

  o constituent analysis

- progression from the simple to the more complex solutions within each of the above subdivisions e.g.:

  o the determination of word class (e.g. from noun to adverb)

  o the determination of function (e.g. from subject to object complement)

  o constituent analysis (e.g. from one-word constituents to multi-word units – starting with groups, moving through paratagms, into clauses – first finite and then non-finite)

- a division of subject matter according to the expectations and requirements at each level of education: primary school, secondary school (stx, hf, hhx, htx) teacher training college, and university

Students in the standard Danish secondary school ("alment gymnasium") will begin by clicking on the stx link and then work their way through the topics specified in the study plan for that particular program.

1.2.1.1. Working with the University of Southern Denmark (SDU)

As mentioned above, I came to Odense in 1971. At that time what is now SDU (with campuses in Odrnse, Kolding, Esbjerg, and Sønderborg) was known as Odense University (with a single campus – in Odense). During the ensuing years I taught numerous courses in grammar and linguistics to hundreds of university students and I have been an active participant in a variety of research and development projects. I have also held numerous administrative posts dealing directly with study programs and curriculum development. The nost relevant of these are: chairman of the English Department and the affiliated Study Board ("studienævn"), member of the Faculty Senate for the Humanities, chairman of the IT-commttee for the humanities, For several years I served as founder and director of the IT-Center for staff in the Institute of Language and Communication. I currently represent the Humanities faculty on he university's newly created patent committee, and I am co-ordinator for two exehange programs between SDU and American universities.

1.2.1.2. *Working with the traditional Danish secondary schools (stx, hf)*

With financial support from the Danish Ministry of Education during the years 2000-2003, members of the VISL group cooperated with 10 ministerial advisors ("fagkonsulenter") to extend the VISL system from the university sector to Danish secondary schools. This resulted in a new interface providing language materials aimed directly at the 10 languages taught in the "stx" program. The Ministry also provided funding to run a number of day-long courses to introduce the system to secondary school teachers. 125 teachers from across the country attended these courses.

1.2.1.3. *Working with HHX and HTX*

In the period 2002-2003, financial support was provided by ELU (= "Efteruddannelsesudvalget for Længerevarende Uddannede"), to introduce VISL into the HHX school system. As a result of this project, the author was appointed by the Ministry of Education to serve on two advisory boards whose task it is to revise, respectively, the English degree programs (Level A) for HHX and HTX in accordance with the Ministry's new reform program for secondary education.

1.2.1.4. *Working with Danish teacher training colleges and primary schools*

With additional support from ELU (2004-2005) a new partnership has recently been entered into with Danish teacher training colleges – the goal being to bring VISL into this education program as well, and hence ultimately into Danish primary schools. At the same time, a partnership has been inaugurated directly with three primary schools (two from Funen and one from Jutland) with the goal of adding to the VISL website an interface which is aimed specifically at this sector.

1.3. Course design and goals

Throughout the text I have tried to highlight current issues and problems facing today's linguists and grammarians – so that you can gain a better understanding of where grammarians agree and where they disagree. Occasionally, I have provided a few additional references where you can learn more about particular linguistic issues.

In addition, all important grammatical labels (such as "constituent", "*do*-support", "tag questions", etc.) are highlighted and defined when they are first introduced. At the end of each chapter, these key words are listed in alphabetical order and linked to their first occurrence in the text. Thus, clicking on any of the words in the list will take you directly to the relevant definition and context. At the end of the book, all the key words are listed again, in alphabetical order – forming an interactive terminology index.

1.4. The intended audience

The course is aimed primarily at students and teachers in the Danish secondary school system (stx, hf, hhx, htx), and in the teacher training colleges (seminarier), but I hope that it will also find interested readers in both the primary and tertiary education systems, as well as among those who, like myself, find the study of language structure immensely fascinating.

By making use of links to those VISL modules which deal specifically with e.g. stx/hf, hhx, and htx, one flexible course can accommodate participants from all these areas.

And by using the same text for all these programs, it becomes possible for both teachers and students to move more freely among the programs – without having to "start over". This freedom of movement has long been available in disciplines such as mathematics, chemistry, and physics. It has been relatively rare in the study and teaching of language.

The course seeks to contribute to the new program for improving the understanding of language and language structure in general ("Almen Sprogforståelse") as recommended by the Danish Ministry of Education in its latest reform plan for secondary education in Denmark ("Reform af de gymnasiale uddannelser").

1.5. A Danish version

The course is currently being rendered into Danish by Anette Wulff (Institute of Language and Communication, University of Southern Denmark). The working title in Danish is *En let tilgængelig indføring i grammatikkens vidunderlige verden*. As is the case with the English version, the Danish version will also be available electronically on the VISL website.

1.6. Why study grammar?

I am often asked the following fundamental question: Why study grammar at all? In his recent book, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press, revised ed. 2000), Professor David Crystal provides an enlightening response to this question:

> *Because it's there. People are constantly curious about the world in which they live, and wish to understand it and (as with mountains) master it. Grammar is no different from any other domain of knowledge in this respect.*
>
> *But more than mountains, language is involved with almost everything we do as human beings. We cannot live without language. To understand the linguistic dimension of our existence would be no mean achievement. And grammar is the fundamental organizing principle of language.*
>
> *Our grammatical ability is extraordinary. It is probably the most creative ability we have. There is no limit to what we can say or write, yet all of this potential is controlled by a finite set of rules.*
>
> *Nonetheless, our language can let us down. We encounter ambiguity, imprecision, and unintelligible speech or writing. To deal with these problems, we need to put grammar under the microscope and work out what went wrong.*

After studying grammar, we should be more alert to the strength, flexibility, and variety of our language, and thus be in a better position to use it and to evaluate others' use of it, Whether our own usage in fact improves, as a result, is less predictable. Our awareness must improve, but turning that awareness into better practice – by speaking and writing more effectively – requires an additional set of skills. Even after a course in car mechanics, we can still drive carelessly. (p. 191)

The search for (or "discovery", if you like) and formulation of this finite set of grammatical rules to which Crystal refers is in itself a fascinating aspect of the study of grammar. It is thought-provoking to contemplate the following fact: Despite nearly 200 years of investigation and contemplation by linguists and grammarians, no grammar book has yet been written in which one can find all the rules that constitute the grammar of English (or Danish). In fact, a five-year-old native speaker of English "knows" more English grammar than is recorded in any (or all) English grammar books ever written. The same applies, of course, to native speakers of all other languages, including Danish.

1.7. Knowing grammar vs. knowing about grammar

It is a commonplace today to distinguish between "knowing grammar" and "knowing **about** grammar". Here is another relevant remark from Crystal: "Millions of people believe they are failures at grammar, say they have forgotten it, or deny that they know any grammar at all – in each case using their grammar convincingly to make their point." (Crystal 2000, p. 190).

Crystal's point is regularly confirmed in my own classroom: my students' lack of knowledge about English grammar is not necessarily reflected in their English communication skills. They continue to impress me with their generally high level of spoken English. In fact – though this is difficult to verify – I believe it is the case that while my current students know considerably less about English grammar than did my students back in the 1970's, their spoken English is better than that of those former students.

In other words, they *do* "know" English, but they are unable to express this knowledge in the form of specific rules or tendencies. This is not surprising. We daily perform all sorts of activities perfectly which we would find difficult to describe in detail to someone who knew nothing about them: walking, breathing, digesting our breakfast, keeping our balance while riding a bicycle, etc.

What kind of grammar rules are we talking about here? The next chapter investigates one tiny corner of English (and Danish) grammar, and sketches some of the rules that native speakers "know" – but since they do not "know about" them, it is unlikely that they could formulate them with any precision. One of the main goals of this course is to help you know more "about" English (and Danish) grammar.

Further reading:

Palmer, Frank. Grammar. *Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England. 2nd edition 1984 (1st edition 1971).*

Though this book is now more than 30 years old, it is still valuable for its clear exposition of a wide range of grammatical issues – not least the influence of Latin on "traditional grammar", the differences between speech and writing, and the notion of "correctness". For those who are unfamiliar with Noam Chomsky's early views on transformational grammar, Chapter 8 offers an informative thumbnail sketch of this revolutionary new theory. The book also provides interesting linguistic data from a variety of languages. In addition to Latin, we find e.g. Arabic, Dyribal (a language spoken by Australian aborigines), French, Gleez (Classical Ethiopic), Italian, Malagasy (spoken on Madagascar), Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Tigrinya (spoken in Ethiopia), and Turkish. First published in 1971, Palmer's book was so popular that it went through 8 reprintings before a second, revised edition appeared in 1984.

• Key words for Chapter 1:

- DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR
- PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR

Section 3: A CASE STUDY – tag-questions in English and Danish

Consider the following sentences:

- *Your brother is applying for a job with the telephone company, isn't he?*

- *Your brother is not applying for a job with the telephone company, is he?*

Sentences such as these are known as "**TAG**-**QUESTIONS**". The speaker begins with a statement (e.g. *"Your brother is applying for a job with the telephone company"*), but then adds a tag in the form of a question – thereby inviting verification from the hearer. Such tag-questions are very common in English, and the rules behind their construction are learned by native speakers at a very early age. But children must work the rules out for themselves, because – though Mom and Dad "know" the rules, they are not likely to "know about" the rules in any conscious sense. Hence they cannot formulate the rules for their children and "teach" them how to form tag-questions. In fact, these rules are absent from many English grammar books.

What are the rules? There are several operations involved – most of them ensuring that the tag takes on a question form while remaining considerably shorter than the opening statement. For convenience, I have numbered the operations from 1 to 7 though the ordering is not intended to make any claims about the actual mental sequence of events. No one knows how, or in what order, such grammatical operations are carried out in the human brain.

OPERATION 1: Find the subject of the main clause (e.g. "your brother")

OPERATION 2: Select the appropriate personal pronoun for the tag (e.g. "he")

OPERATION 3: Find the predicator of the main clause (e.g. "is applying")

OPERATION 4: Put the first verb in the predicator into the tag – this verb is often called the **OPERATOR** (e.g. "is")

OPERATION 5: If the main clause is negative, make the tag positive; if the main clause is positive, make the tag negative (in linguistic terms, this is known as reversing the **POLARITY**).

OPERATION 6: Form a contraction out of the verb and the negative particle in the tag (e.g. "is not" becomes "isn't") – this becomes the new operator.

OPERATION 7: Reverse the order of the subject pronoun and the operator in the tag (e.g. "he isn't" becomes "isn't he").

This strikes me as quite a "wonderful" package of grammatical operations – wonderful in several respects. First of all that there is a clear system involved. Secondly, that it is quite complex. Thirdly, that despite this complexity, it is learned independently by generations of very young native speakers without direct guidance from mature native speakers. Fourthly, this package of operations represents only a tiny corner of the vast grammatical system behind the English language. That children can master the whole system within a few years of birth can but fill the observer with wonder (hence the original sense of "wonderful" is also applicable here).

At the risk of overdoing the point, I feel compelled to add that the seven operations listed above do not even tell the full story about tag-questions. There are a number of other grammatical features which native speakers acquire along the way:

- irregular contractions of operator + *not*:
    - *will + not = won't* (e.g. *You will join us, won't you?*)
    - *shall + not = shan't* (e.g. *I shall be able to see better soon, shan't I?*)
    - *am + not = aren't* (e.g. *I am right about that, aren't I?*)
- lack of contraction altogether: In a more formal style, contractions can be avoided. When this happens, the negative particle ("not") does not become part of the operator, and therefore does not appear to the left of the subject:
    - *She is rich, isn't she?* (informal)
    - *She is rich, is she **not**?* (formal)
- *DO*-**SUPPORT**: If the predicator does not contain an operator, English makes use of the "dummy" verb *do* wherever an operator is needed:
    - *She likes chocolate, **doesn't** she?*
    - *She **doesn't** like chocolate, does she?*
- irony/sarcasm: When the main statement is positive, a reversal of the polarity in the tag can sometimes be omitted to provide a sense of irony or sarcasm. Thus the following sentence could mean: "So you think you have finished your homework. Well, I have news for you"):
    - *You have finished your homework, have you?*

This option of parallel polarity is not available if the main statement is negative:

- **You haven't finished your homework, haven't you?* (The asterisk, *, marks the sentence as unacceptable English.)

So much for tag-questions in English. Let us turn our attention now to Danish. Interestingly, the principles for formulating tag-questions in Danish are very similar to those we have examined for English – but they are rarely mentioned in Danish grammar books:

- *Din bror har søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet, har han ikke?*

- *Din bror har ikke søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet, har han?*

OPERATION 1: Find the subject of the main clause (e.g. "din bror")

OPERATION 2: Select the appropriate personal pronoun for the tag (e.g. "han")

OPERATION 3: Find the predicator of the main clause (e.g. "har søgt")

OPERATION 4: Put the first verb in the predicator into the tag (e.g. "har")

OPERATION 5: If the main clause is negative, make the tag positive; if the main clause is positive, make the tag negative.

OPERATION 6: Reverse the order of the subject pronoun and the operator in the tag (e.g. "han har" becomes "har han").

We see that six of the seven operations cited for English apply – unchanged – to Danish. So it appears that Danish-speaking children face the same challenges in this little corner of grammar as English-speaking children do. It is striking parallels like these that have led many linguists to adopt the view that there exists some sort of "universal grammar", which underlies all human languages, and that children of every nationality are born with a highly evolved propensity to work out major features of this system based on language data they receive from the linguistic community they happen to be born into. Of course, in this particular case, it must be kept in mind that English and Danish are closely related languages – they belong to the Germanic branch of Indo-European languages. So we may be witnessing a set of operations which – rather than being universal – are shared by Germanic languages.

Before leaving Danish, it should be noted that – as with English – Danish tag-questions involve a number of grammatical features other than the operations listed above:

- replacement of the whole tag by *ikke også* or *vel*:

  o *Din bror har søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet, **ikke også**?*

  o *Din bror har ikke søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet, **vel**?*

As these examples indicate, *ikke også* is used for the negative tag, *vel* for the positive tag. These expressions are more informal than their longer counterparts:

  o *Din bror har søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet, har han ikke?*

  o *Din bror har ikke søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet, har han?*

- Note that *vel* may also be appended to the positive tag:

  o *Din bror har ikke søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet, har han vel?*

- But typically Danes tend to make the spoken tags shorter rather than longer. This is done by reducing the number of syllables in the *ikke også* and *vel* tags. Since *vel* is already a one-syllable word, this is not subject to further shortening. But consider some of the options for *ikke også* (spelling conventions vary here):

  - *Din bror har søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet,* **ikke også***?* (4 syllables)

  - *Din bror har søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet,* **ig å***?* (2 syllables)

  - *Din bror har søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet,* **ig os***?* (2 syllables)

  - *Din bror har søgt arbejde hos telefonselskabet,* **gos***?* (1 syllable)

- *gøre*-support: Recall that if the predicator does not contain an operator, English calls on the "dummy" verb *do* wherever an operator is needed. Danish grammar contains a similar operation, using the verb *gøre* as a stand-in operator:

  - *Hun elsker chokolade,* **gør** *hun ikke?*

  - *Hun elsker ikke chokolade,* **gør** *hun (vel)?*

I hope that this little ramble through one small portion of the English and Danish grammar landscapes has sufficiently illustrated both the complexity and the beauty of rule systems for natural languages, while at the same time illuminating the distinction between "knowing grammar" and "knowing about" grammar. I predict that whether your native language is English or Danish, you "knew" most if not all of the rules for tag-questions listed in this chapter for your own language – in that you use them in your daily production of English or Danish sentences. At the same time, I predict that you did not "know about" them – in the sense that you could have listed them for a foreign friend who wished to learn how to form tag-questions in your language. In fact, I suspect that you have never seen these rules in any English or Danish grammar book. And yet, in one way or another, versions of these rules are in the heads of all native speakers of English and Danish, respectively. You worked them out for yourself as you were growing up.

Further reading:

Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct. Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England.* 1994..

Steven Pinker is a Professor in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University. Until 2003, he taught in the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at MIT. This particular book has had a very wide readership around the world. The following short quotations from two delighted reviewers

provide some sense of the interest and excitement with which the book was received:

> *A marvellously readable book . . . illuminates every facet of human language: its biological origin, its uniqueness to humanity, its acquisition by children, its grammatical structure, the production and perception of speech, the pathology of language disorders, and the unstoppable origin of languages and dialects.* (Christopher-Longuet Higgins in *Nature)*

<p style="text-align:center">* * * * * * *</p>

> *Reading Steven Pinker's book is one of the biggest favours I've ever done my brain . . . highly accessible to the general reader yet at the same time seminal for professionals . . . exhilaratingly brilliant.* (Richard Hawkins)

For a more negative view of Pinker's book, you might wish to read Geoffrey Sampson's *Educating Eve* (Cassell, 1997):

> *This book is a reply to Steven Pinker's 1994 book* The Language Instinct. *Pinker's book argued that detailed knowledge of language is biologically innate in human beings.* Educating Eve *examines all of Pinker's arguments, as well as the older arguments on which Pinker relies. It claims that each strand of argument either is logically fallacious, or is based on false premisses.* (Andrew Carnie)

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<p style="text-align:center; color:magenta"><big><big>Key words for Chapter 2:</big></big></p>

- *DO*-SUPPORT
- OPERATOR
- POLARITY
- TAG-QUESTION

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SECTION 4: About VISL

This section is divided into two parts: an opening chapter providing background information about VISL, followed by a chapter which introduces some of VISL's basic grammatical principles.

4.1. Background

VISL (= "Visual Interactive Syntax Learning") is a research and development project headed by a group of language teachers at the Institute of Language and Communication (ISK) at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) in Odense. The VISL project was launched in 1996 and has so far involved more than 10,000,000 Danish crowns and several thousand working hours from staff, language students, and student programmers. The system is freely available over the Internet at the following address:

visl.sdu.dk

Knowledge of the VISL system is already fairly widespread among secondary school teachers. In 2002 the Danish Ministry of Education decided to recommend the system as the standard for Danish and for the 9 foreign languages taught in the traditional secondary school system ("gymnasierne"). The system has also been introduced to a number of teachers and students in Danish business schools ("hhx"). Many VISL courses have been held for secondary school teachers and other interested staff from a wide range of educational institutions. Course activity is growing year by year as information about VISL spreads across the country. The most recent courses have also had participants from primary schools and teacher training colleges. If you are interested in arranging a VISL workshop for your students or colleagues, please contact ISK's IT-Center at SDU (telephone: 65 50 33 62).

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4.2. Some basic principles (P0 – P8)

This chapter outlines and illustrates some of VISL's basic grammatical principles. We begin with the most basic principles of all – one that is a feature of the scientific method in general:

4.2.1. Segmentation and classification (P0)

As in most analytical systems, sentence analysis involves two basic procedures: **SEGMENTATION** and **CLASSIFICATION**:

- o Segmentation deals with the breaking up of the object under analysis into its relevant parts. In syntactic analysis, the object is typically the sentence, and the parts are called **CONSTITUENTS**.

- o Classification deals with the labelling of each of the parts. In syntactic analysis, this means labelling each of the constituents.

4.2.2. Four basic types of constituent (P1)

In the VISL system, there are four basic types of constituent:

- o the individual word

- o the group

- o the compound unit (also called the paratagm)

- o the clause

Here are examples of each:

- o I saw Peter.

- o I saw my former roommate.

- o I saw Peter and Alfred.

- o I saw that the house needed new windows.

4.2.3. Two labels – form and function (P2)

In the VISL system, each constituent receives two labels:

- o a function label (written in capital letters, followed by small letters if needed to denote a subcategory)

- o a form label (written in small letters)

Function and form labels are separated by a colon. Thus the underlined constituents in the 4 examples above can be labelled as follows:

- o I saw Peter. (Od:n)

- o I saw my former roommate. (Od:g)

- o I saw Peter and Alfred. (Od:par)

- o I saw that the house needed new windows. (Od:cl)

Note that while each of these constituents' functions as a direct object (Od), the forms are respectively noun (n), group (g), paratagm (par), and clause (cl).

4.2.4. VISL's "cafeteria" of word classes with fixed color scheme (P3)

In the VISL system, individual words are classified according to a small set of WORD CLASSES. Each language chooses from the same "cafeteria" of word classes (the VISL system for English, for example, uses 11 of these classes). Each word class is assigned a unique color, most of which fall into either a blue/green or a red/orange spectrum.

4.2.4.1 The blue/green spectrum (for noun-related word classes)

This group of colors is meant to suggest stability. It is "object-oriented". The prototypical member is the noun, but the group also includes those classes which are typically associated with nouns:

- o n = noun (dark blue), e.g. *table, courage, milk, leaves, Berlin, Microsoft*

- o pron = pronoun (light blue), e.g. *him, my, yours, it, some, many, all, each*

- o adj = adjective (dark green), e.g. *lovely, old, fierce, remarkable, alone, medical*

- o num = numeral (light green), e.g. *three, forty-two, second, fifth, 125*

- o art = article (olive green), e.g. *a, an, the*

4.2.4.2. The red/orange spectrum (for verb-related word classes)

This group of colors is meant to suggest action and movement. It is "process-oriented". The prototypical member is the verb, but the group also includes those classes which are typically associated with verbs:

- o v = verb (red), e.g. *run*, *opened, fell, watching, driven, shall, must, have, be, is, were, -'ll, -'ve, -'re* (as in, respectively, *I'll, they've, we're*)

- o adv = adverb (yellow), e.g. *often, regularly, up, out, clockwise, already, not, -n't* (as in *isn't*)

- o infm = infinitive marker (orange), *to* (as in *to go*)

4.2.4.3. Other colors

The three members of this "group" have nothing in common, other than that they do not belong to either of the preceding two groups.

- o intj = interjection (flesh colored), e.g. *ow, ouch, oops, wow, yes, no, OK*

- o conj = conjunction (grey), e.g. *and, or, but, (n)either, (n)or, that, if, because, whether*

- o prp = preposition (brown), e.g. *in, on, between, over, up, out, through, beside, near*

4.2.5. The syntactic structure of groups (P4)

In the VISL system, **GROUPS (g)** are characterized by an obligatory **HEAD** (H) and one or more **DEPENDENTS** (D). Thus <u>my former roommate</u> is an Od:g which can be further analyzed as D:pron + D:adj + H:n. The name of the group is determined by the word class to which the head belongs:

- noun group (<u>my former roommate</u>) (D:pron + D:adj + H:n)
- verb group (<u>may be sleeping</u>) (D:v + D:v + H:v)
- adjective group (<u>very beautiful</u>) (D:adv + H:adj)
- adverb group (<u>rather surprisingly</u>) (D:adv + H:adv)
- pronoun group (<u>some of the books</u>) (H:pron + D:g)
- preposition group (<u>on the table</u>) (H:prp + D:g)

NB: a preposition group is always **BINARY** - that is, it always consists of exactly two constituents: a preposition, which functions as the HEAD, and the remainder, which functions as the DEPENDENT. Here are some examples:

- <u>in Spain</u> (H:prp + D:n)
- <u>to my brother</u> (H:prp + D:g)
- <u>near the little red schoolhouse</u> (H:prp + D:g)
- <u>from whatever source you choose</u> (H:prp + D:cl)
- <u>in the middle of the night</u> (H:prp + D:g)

4.2.6. The syntactic structure of paratagms (P5)

In the VISL system, **PARATAGMS** (par) are characterized by a **CO-ORDINATOR** (CO) and one or more **CONJOINTS** (CJT). Thus <u>Peter and Alfred</u> is an Od:par which can be further analyzed as CJT:n + CO:conj + CJT:n.

4.2.7. The syntactic structure of clauses (P6)

In the VISL system, **CLAUSES** are characterized by the presence of two or more functions from a list we refer to as SPOAC + SUB:

- S = Subject
- P = Predicator
- O = Object
- A = Adverbial
- C = Complement
- SUB = Subordinator

Thus <u>that the house needed new windows</u> is an Od:cl which can be further analyzed as SUB:conj + S:g + P:v + Od:g.

4.2.8. Dealing with discontinuous constituents (P7)

In the VISL system, **DISCONTINUOUS CONSTITUENTS** are indicated by means of a hyphen notation. Compare the following analyses:

- o They have visited Copenhagen. (S:pron + P:g + Od:n)

- o They have not visited Copenhagen. (S:pron + P:g- + A:adv + -P:g + Od:n)

- o Have they visited Copenhagen? (P:g- + S:pron + -P:g + Od:n)

As illustrated above, one of the most common types of discontinuous constituent is the verb group. Preposition groups are also often discontinuous. Consider the following examples:

- o The letter is from my sister (S:g + P:v + A:g)

- o Who(m) is the letter from? (A:g- + P:v + S:g + -A:g)

A sentence may contain more than one discontinuous constituent:

- o Who(m) did you receive the letter from? (A:g- + P:g- + S:pron + -P:g + Od:g + -A:g)

4.9 One system for all VISL languages (P8)

It is a fundamental feature of the VISL system that all VISL languages draw from the same "cafeteria" of form and function labels, with the result that when users have become familiar with the system for one of the VISL languages, they can comprehend the analyses supplied for all VISL languages. Similarly, the color scheme for the word classes is the same for all VISL languages.

Further reading:

- Eckhard Bick, *Grammy i Klostermølleskoven – "VISL-lite: Tværsproglig sætningsanalyse for begyndere* (mnemo 2002): This booklet (65 pages) provides a cross-linguistic introduction to grammatical terminology and syntactic analysis by means of a short story whose main characters are a baby hippopotamus ("Grammy") from South Africa, a young beaver ("Michael") from Germany, and a young girl ("Ronja") from Denmark. What they have in common is an abiding fascination with and curiosity about language structure. Their conversations lead to interesting discoveries about similarities and differences among the three languages – Danish, English, and German. The booklet contains a number of exercise sentences graded according to difficulty (French and Spanish exercises are also present). *Grammy* is intimately integrated into the VISL website,

which means that solutions for all the sentences can be found at the site. It also means that all the sentences are available for VISL's language games as well. Should you wish to purchase a copy of *Grammy,* you may do so through ISK's IT-Center at SDU (telephone: 65 50 33 62).

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Key words for Chapter 4:

- **BINARY**
- **CLASSIFICATION**
- **CLAUSE**
- **CONJOINT**
- **CONSTITUENT**
- **CO-ORDINATOR**
- **DEPENDENT**
- **DISCONTINUOUS CONSTITUENT**
- **GROUP**
- **HEAD**
- **PARATAGM**
- **PART OF SPEECH**
- **SEGMENTATION**
- **WORD CLASS**

</div>

4.3. Syntactic trees

So far we have looked at a syntactic analysis as a simple linear string of paired symbols, e.g.

> o Who(m) did you receive the letter from? (A:g- + P:g- + S:pron + -P:g + Od:g + -A:g)

From a pedagogical point of view, it is generally more meaningful to display the analysis in the form of a syntactic tree (also referred to in VISL as a "slant tree (Java) applet") – particularly in the case of longer, more complex constructions. This makes it possible to see hierarchical as well as linear structure. Consider the following tree for the above sentence:

<p style="text-align:center">PUT IN TREE DIAGRAM</p>

Such a tree is made up of NODES, BRANCHES, and LEAVES.

4.3.1. About nodes

The **NODES** supply the form and function labels (e.g. "S:pron"). In other words, nodes supply the classification of the constituent.

4.3.2. About branches

From each node comes one or more **BRANCHES**. Branches manifest segmentation. Each branch represents one constituent, unless the constituent is discontinuous, in which case the branch represents part – typically one half – of the constituent. As already noted, discontinuity is marked by hyphens in the linear analysis. In tree diagrams, discontinuity is marked by jagged edges on the relevant nodes. In the present example, two of the constituents are discontinuous (A:g and P:g).

A branch leads either to another node or to a leaf.

4.3.3. About leaves

A **LEAF** is typically a **LEXICAL ITEM** (e.g. "receive") – that is, a word from the dictionary (also called a "lexicon")

4.3.4. Relationships among constituents

Relationships among constituents are typically specified in terms of female kinship terms familiar to us from family trees. The most commonly expressed relationships are: MOTHER, DAUGHTER and SISTER. In the present case, Od:g is the mother of both D:art and H:n, while D:art and H:n are both daughters of Od:g. D:art and H:n are sisters.

4.3.5. Ill-formed trees

A tree is ill-formed just in case one or more of the following conditions is violated:

- Branches may not cross one another.

- Only one branch may lead into any given node.

- In the standard VISL system, if only one branch exits from a node, that branch must terminate in a leaf – it may not enter another node.

A tree that is not ill-formed is said to be well-formed. Any sentence which is correctly analyzed can be associated with at least one well-formed tree. If a sentence is syntactically ambiguous (that is, if it has more than one legitimate analysis), there will be one well-formed tree for each analysis.

<p style="text-align:center">PUT IN EXAMPLES OF ILL-FORMED TREES</p>

Further reading:

- **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, John (with Carl Bache, Mike Davenport, and Fritz Larsen), *An Introduction to English Sentence Analysis.* Gyldendal:Copenhagen. 3rd ed. 1999 (1st ed. 1991): This book employs (an early version of) the VISL system throughout. The main differences between the two systems involve the following labels: DEP →D, prep → prp, cu →par, pro →pron (Note: the notation to the left of the arrow is the one in the book, the one on the right is now standard VISL.) Each chapter contains illustrations of how to analyze given syntactic constructions – as well as a number of sentences to practice on. Solutions (using the standard VISL symbols) for all the exercises can be found on the VISL website.

Key words for Chapter 5:

- **BRANCH**

- **LEAF**

- **LEXICAL ITEM**

- **NODE**

EXERCISE 5a: Some short sentences for syntactic analysis

Try out your analytical skills on some of the following sentences from English and Danish. To check your solutions, click on "check". If you are operating from within the VISL site, this will result in the downloading of a Java applet containing the VISL analysis of the given sentence. At first you will see only the top "node" of the syntactic tree. To see the full tree, simply click on *Expand tree* in the menu options on the left hand side of the screen. You might also wish to select the colon notation (where function and form are separated by a colon, instead of the default case where the function label appears above the form label). To do this, select "Function left of form" in the *Display* menu at the top of the screen.

ENGLISH

WWG1) Henry laughed.	check
WWG2) John called last night.	check
WWG3) The house was painted.	check
WWG4) The car broke down.	check
WWG5) He was a great joker.	check
WWG6) Yesterday she picked a whole bunch.	check
WWG7) This is the last sentence.	check
WWG8) I'll tell you everything I know.	check
WWG9) The book on the table is mine.	check
WWG10) My book is on the table.	check

DANISH

WWG11) Natten kommer.	check
WWG12) Mørket sænker sig.	check
WWG13) Solen går ned.	check
WWG14) Bæverunger spiser fisken.	check
WWG15) Michael fælder træer til sin dæmning.	check
WWG16) Solen skinner på himlen.	check
WWG17) Giv mig dem.	check
WWG18) Giv dem til mig.	check

11. Direct links to VISL's language games and quizzes

The VISL site contains a number of language games and quizzes which provide users with the opportunity of testing their knowledge of language structure and grammatical terminology in a highly interactive fashion. Feedback is immediate, individualized, and freely available around the clock. Most of the games keep track of high scores over given periods of time (e.g. 365 days, 30 days, 24 hours), so users can compare their best performances with other players from around the world. The following games and quizzes play a significant role in connection with this course:

- form games: Paintbox, Word Fall, Shooting Gallery, Labyrinth

- function games: Syntris, Space Rescue

morphology game: Balloon Ride

izzes: Match Form, Match Function

games is provided with help menus in both English and Danish at the VISL site itself. ffer information on the nature of each game as well as detailed instructions on how to

e ample opportunity to become familiar with these games, one by one, later in this course, uld you wish to explore some (or all) of them now, a brief description of each of these and quizzes is supplied below. In addition, links are provided to the different help menus he relevant sentences in English and Danish – as well as to the desired secondary school (stx/hf, hhx, htx).

all these games and quizzes come from Eckhard Bick and John Dienhart, while the mming is the work of skilled and dedicated students from the Mærsk McKinney Møller of Production Technology (MIP) at SDU in Odense. As these students graduate, new are hired to replace them, with the result that the program code for most of the games ly is the product of more than one programmer. In fact, interpreting and editing the code by a predecessor can often be more challenging than starting from scratch. Despite these ations, I have chosen to list only one programmer for each of the games and quizzes. This ery case the person who has spent most time developing the program. He is listed as the y programmer" (for more details, see the programming credits for each game on the VISL

Form *(original programmer: Morten Baun Møller)*

INSERT MATCH FORM IMAGE

ption:

data: Danish   English

s: **Danish** **English**

em: **stx** **hf** **hhx** **htx**

tbox *(primary programmer: Thomas Klitbo)*

INSERT PAINTBOX IMAGE

ption:

uage do you want the sentences in? **Danish** **English**

uage do you want the instructions in? **Danish** **English**

What school system do you want? **stx** **hf** **hhx** **htx**

4.4.3. Word Fall *(primary programmer: Rasmus Lock Larsen)*

INSERT WORD FALL IMAGE

Brief description:

Language data: Danish **English**

Instructions: **Danish** **English**

School system: **stx** **hf** **hhx** **htx**

4.4.4. Shooting Gallery *(primary programmer: Rasmus Lock Larsen)*

INSERT SHOOTING GALLERY IMAGE

Brief description:

Language data: Danish **English**

Instructions: **Danish** **English**

School system: **stx** **hf** **hhx** **htx**

4.4.5. Labyrinth *(primary programmer: Thomas Klitbo)*

Brief description:

Language data: Danish   English

Instructions: Danish   English

School system: stx   hf   hhx   htx

4.4.6. **Match Function** *(original programmer: Morten Baun Møller)*

Brief description:

Language data: Danish   English

Instructions: Danish   English

School system: stx   hf   hhx   htx

4.4.7. Syntris *(primary programmer: Jens Brask Nielsen)*

Brief description:

Language data: Danish   English

Instructions: Danish   English

School system: stx   hf   hhx   htx

4.4.8. Space Rescue *(primary programmer: Rasmus Lock Larsen)*

Brief description:

Language data: Danish   English

Instructions: Danish   English

School system: stx   hf   hhx   htx

4.4.9. Balloon Ride *(primary programmer: Jens Brask Nielsen)*

INSERT BALLOON RIDE IMAGE

SECTION 2: Word classes

Classifying objects in general

The classification of "objects", whether concrete or abstract, is so much a part of the human condition that we are seldom aware of the important role it plays in our daily lives. Consider, for example, the way we store material objects in our homes. Each room is likely to have its own collection of objects "classified" according to different features of form and/or function. In the kitchen, for example, eating utensils will typically have a drawer to themselves, and in that drawer they will be further subclassified according to both form and function: knives, forks, and spoons each having their own compartments. The kitchen will also contain various collections of plates, saucers, bowls, cups, and glasses classified according to size and shape. Our living rooms generally contain arrays of e.g. books, records, tapes, videos, DVD's – all arranged according to schemes which vary from individual to individual. And so on. We are often not fully conscious of the various classification systems we employ in these instances until some helpful guest puts things away for us – and we later discover that some items are "out of place" (misclassified).

Classifying words

When a sentence constituent consists of a single word, the form label is customarily just the name of the word class to which that word is assigned. Simple as this may sound in theory, there are several problems when it comes to actual practice. The three most basic problems are the following:

- Grammarians generally do not agree on the *number* of word classes which are relevant for any given language.

- Grammarians generally do not agree on the *set of labels* for word classes assigned to any given language.

- Many words in a given language are *difficult to classify*, for one of two reasons: a) they do not seem to fit comfortably in any of the assigned classes, and/or they seem to belong to two or more classes at the same time.

It should also be borne in mind that languages make use of different sets of word classes. Latin, for example, has no articles.

This course adopts the standard VISL system for English – 11 word classes. These can be conveniently subclassified into three groups:

- the "minor" word classes (article, preposition, conjunction, pronoun)
- the "major" word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs)
- other word classes (infinitive marker, interjection, numeral)

system applies very nicely to Danish as well as English, although some VISL members of e Danish group would like to add one more word class (proper nouns), bringing the anish count up to 12. More on this below.

APTER 7: "Minor" word classes vs. "major" word classes

It is important at the outset to gain a clear sense of the traditional distinction between *minor* and *major* when these labels are used to refer to word classes. As a point of departure, it should be noted that the word *minor* does not mean "insignificant", nor does *major* mean "significant". Grammatically speaking, in fact, the minor word classes are highly significant. It would be difficult indeed to construct an English or Danish text of any length without involving one or more of these classes. The word *minor* is therefore best interpreted as meaning "(relatively) small", while major means "(relatively) large". The minor word classes simply have fewer members than the major word classes. This is due principally to the fact that the minor word classes do not add new members readily. The minor classes are more or less "closed" (to new members), whereas the major classes are "open".

Furthermore, members of the minor word classes typically do not take endings (suffixes) of any kind. Thus, while a noun such as *book* can be made plural by adding the suffix –*s* (*books*), and a verb such as *talk* can be given past tense associations by adding the suffix –*ed* (*talked*), no suffixes can be added to the article *the*, the preposition *in*, the conjunction *and*, or the pronoun *some* (except when these are treated as specific words in a text: e.g. "How many *and*'s are there in this chapter?").

Another distinction between the minor and major word classes is that the latter have, in some sense, more "meaning" than the former. Thus in a sentence such as *The beautiful young cashier put some of the money in her purse and then quietly left the store*, the most meaningful words are those belonging to the major word classes: nouns (*cashier, money, purse, store*), verbs (*put, left*), adjectives (*beautiful, young*) adverbs (*then, quietly*) – whereas the items belonging to the minor word classes are more difficult to define: article (*the*), preposition (*of*), conjunction (*and*), pronouns (*some, her*). This distinction is often captured by saying that the role of the minor word classes is primarily grammatical, while that of the major word classes is primarily lexical.

The following table summarizes the basic differences between the minor and major word classes:

Minor word classes	Major word classes
small	large
closed	open
suffixes are rare	suffixes are common
grammatical	lexical

CHAPTER 8: The "minor" word classes

As noted above, this group contains the following four classes: article, preposition, conjunction, and pronoun.

8.1. The article (VISL abbreviation: art, VISL color: olive green)

This word class has three members in English (a, an, the) and five in Danish (en, et, den, det, de).

Characteristics: The article typically introduces nouns and noun groups:

- ENGLISH*: a boy, an orange, the table, an interesting idea, the first time*

- DANISH: *en dreng, et bord, den bedste bog, det store hus, de sidste busser*

English has the simpler system, distinguishing only between the **definite article** (the) and the **indefinite article** (a, an). The former is typically used when the object or concept expressed by the noun or noun group is assumed to be already known by the participants in the dialogue. The latter is used for introducing new objects and concepts into the dialogue:

- Wife: *I need to buy a new dress for Sandra's party tomorrow.*

- Husband: *What's wrong with the black dress you wore to dinner last night?*

Note that in one sense, English has only one indefinite article, not two. A and an can be viewed as variants of a single form – call it a(n) – since we can predict which form will be used in any given case. The determining factor is whether the word immediately following the article begins with a vowel sound or a consonant sound:

- a (before a consonant sound): *a boy, a cat, a tall tree, a useful tool (!)*

- **an** (before a vowel sound): *an orange, an old farmer, an interesting idea, an hour's delay (!)*

The Danish article system is considerably more complicated than the English system. When <u>en</u> and <u>et</u> are separate words, they behave like the English indefinite article, <u>a(n)</u>, while <u>den</u> and <u>det</u> behave like the English definite article, <u>the</u>:

- Konen: *Jeg skal købe <u>en</u> ny kjole til Birgits fest i morgen.*

- Manden: *Hvad er der galt med <u>den</u> sorte kjole, du havde på til middagen i går?*

However, when <u>en</u> and <u>et</u> lose their status as separate words and become **suffixes** – that is, when they are attached to the end of the noun with which they are affiliated – then they too behave like the English definite article, <u>the</u>:

- Konen: *Jeg er nødt til at købe <u>en</u> ny kjole til Birgits fest i morgen.*

- Manden: *Hvad er der galt med <u>kjolen</u>, du havde på til middagen i går?*

  or

- Manden: *Hvad er der galt med <u>den</u> kjole, du havde på til middagen i går?*

Observe that suffixation can take place only when the noun has no **premodifiers** – that is, only if no descriptive words precede the noun.

Another significant difference between Danish and English is that the Danish articles are sensitive to the **gender** of the noun: <u>en</u> and <u>den</u> are used with nouns of so-called **common gender** ("fælleskøn"), whereas <u>et</u> and <u>det</u> are used with nouns of **neuter gender** ("intetkøn"):

- <u>en</u>/<u>den</u> + *kjole, ske, arm, næse, mand, kvinde, banan, dør, seng, kat, hund, so, hest, kanin*

- <u>et</u>/<u>det</u> + *hus, glas, ben, ansigt, barn, æble, vindue, egern, firben, får, svin, føl, næsehorn*

As the above lists suggest, there do not appear to be any clear rules for determining the gender of Danish nouns. The classification seems to be basically unpredictable – which is rather unfortunate for foreign learners of Danish. One small consolation is the fact that common gender nouns

outnumber neuter gender nouns. In particular, most new nouns that enter the Danish vocabulary from other languages seem to be assigned common gender:

- <u>en</u>/<u>den</u> + *computer, diskette, scanner, CD, DVD, menu, satellit, cola, burger, weekend*

- <u>et</u>/<u>det</u> + *TV, link*

One additional difference between Danish and English should be noted: Whereas in English <u>the</u> marks definiteness for both singular and plural nouns (*<u>the</u> boy, <u>the</u> boys*), Danish marks definiteness in plural nouns differently from singular nouns. If the plural noun is premodified, the definite article is <u>de</u>. If there is no premodifier, definiteness is marked by the suffix, <u>-ne</u>, attached to the plural form of the noun:

- *<u>de</u> nye kjoler, <u>de</u> fleste skeer, <u>de</u> umalede døre, <u>de</u> dyre huse, <u>de</u> franske æbler*

- *<u>kjolerne</u>, <u>skeerne</u>, <u>dørene</u>, <u>husene</u>, <u>æblerne</u>*

If the plural form of the noun does not end in a suffix, *-ene* is added to mark definiteness in the plural when no premodifier is present:

- *mand/mænd/<u>mændene</u>, gås/gæs/<u>gæssene</u>*

Note that the gender of the noun is irrelevant in the formation of definite constructions when the plural form of the noun is involved.

VISL's colon notation for the articles (whether definite or indefinite) is consistently D:art.

8.2. The preposition (VISL abbreviation: prp, VISL color: brown)

Basic characteristics: The most common role of a preposition is to relate one "object" to another. Consider, for example, two concrete objects such as a ball and a table. Many prepositions can be used here.

- The ball is <u>under</u> the table.
- The ball is <u>below</u> the table.
- The ball is <u>beneath</u> the table.
- The ball is <u>near</u> the table.

Other configurations would yield, for example:

- ENGLISH: above, beside, on
- DANISH: over, på, under

Other objects and relationships extend the set of prepositions even further:

- The handkerchief is <u>in</u> the drawer.
- He threw the stone <u>at</u> the rabbit.
- The squirrel ran <u>around</u> the tree.
- Jill rolled <u>down</u> the hill.
- The living room faced <u>toward</u> the south.
- Alice went <u>to</u> Paris <u>with</u> her mother.

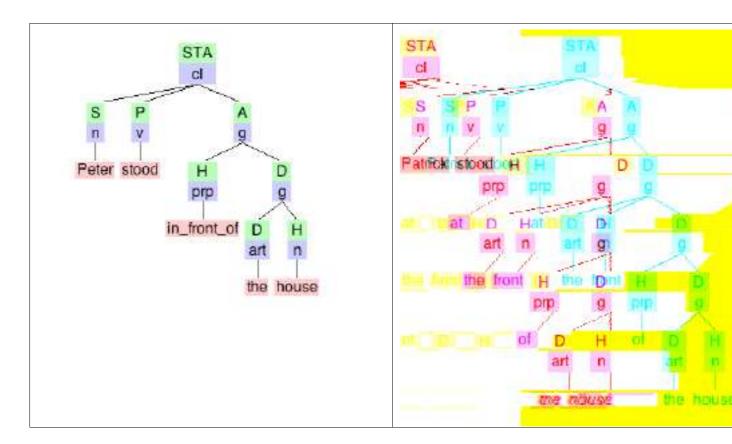At this point we already encounter an interesting and challenging linguistic issue - namely, the status of constructions such as:

- ENGLISH: *alongside, close to, in front of*
- DANISH: *henne ved, neden under, nær ved, oven over, tæt ved, ved siden af*

Some grammarians simply treat such constructions as single units and classify them as **COMPLEX PREPOSITIONS**. But this can have

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unfortunate consequenes for determining membership in the word class of prepositions, because it opens the door for a nearly limitless collection of such constructions: *in place of, in stead of, in lieu of, in view of, in sight of, in line with, in time for, at the back of, near the left corner of.* In my experience, students have difficulty identifying one-word prepositions. Why make life even more complicated?

It also complicates the syntactic analysis, while at the same time doing violence to the basic concept of "group". Clearly, most of these constructions involve some sort of group structure, so there must be a Head in there somewhere and one or more Dependents.

8.3. The conjunction (VISL abbreviation: conj, VISL color: grey)

8.4. The pronoun (VISL abbreviation: pron, VISL color: light blue)

There are many subclasses of pronoun, but it is convenient to group them all under the single heading, "pronoun".

Basic characteristics: Generally speaking, pronouns can be recognized by the fact that they can stand in for a noun (or noun group). Hence the label, "pro" + "noun". Thus, like nouns, pronouns can function as subject (*Bill left; He left; Who left?*), as direct object (*IBM has hired Bill; IBM has hired him; IBM has hired someone*), as subject complement (*The new Mercedes is Helen's; The new Mercedes is hers; The new Mercedes is whose?*) and as dependents in preposition groups (*Alice is afraid of snakes; Alice is afraid of them; Alice is afraid of nothing*). By these tests, words such as the following can be considered members of the pronoun class:

- Eɴɢʟɪsʜ: *I, us, it, some, someone, many, few, all, both, none, this, that, who, what, which*

- Dᴀɴɪsʜ: *jeg, os, det, nogle, få, alle, begge, ingen, dette, hvem, hvad, hvilke*

As the above lists suggest, the pronoun class is both vast and varied. So it is not surprising that grammarians disagree with respect to the number as well as the labels of the various subclasses. Nonetheless, the following categories are fairly traditional:

Gʀᴏᴜᴘ A: Independent personal pronouns

Characteristics: Typical of these pronouns is the fact that they can stand alone without modifiers of any kind:

- Eɴɢʟɪsʜ: *She visited him, The red book is mine, Peter and I are older than you*

- Dᴀɴɪsʜ: *Hun besøgte ham, Den røde bog er min, Peter og jeg er ældre end dig*

These pronouns can be further subclassified according to **PERSON** (1st, 2nd, or 3rd), **NUMBER** (singular or plural), **CASE** (nominative, accusative, or genitive), and in a few instances **GENDER** (masculine, feminine, neuter),

Person: 1st person refers to the speaker(s) (e.g. *I, me, we, us*), 2nd person refers to the person(s) spoken to (e.g. *you*), while 3rd person refers to the person(s) spoken about (e.g. *he, him, her, them*).

Number: Be careful not to confuse this category with person. English and Danish make use of two members in the number category: singular (e.g.*I, me, him*) and plural (e.g. *we, us, them*) – though one could also argue for a third member: dual (e.g. *both*, *neither*).

Case: It is customary in English and Danish to distinguish three cases in the system of personal pronouns: nominative, accusative, and genitive. The nominative case is typically used for the subject, the genitive for possession or ownership, and the accusative for everything else.

- nominative (nom)

    - ENGLISH: *She resigned, They are rich, We were not invited, You should leave now*

    - DANISH: *Hun sagde op, De er rige, Vi blev ikke inviteret, Du burde gå nu*

- genitive (gen)

    - ENGLISH: *This bike is mine, not yours; These plates are heavier than ours*

    - DANISH: *Denne cykel er min, ikke din; Disse tallerkener er tungere end vores*

- accusative (acc)

    - ENGLISH: *Nobody has seen him, Bob gave him the book, Bob gave the book to him*

    - DANISH: *Ingen har set ham, Bob gav ham bogen, Bob gav bogen til ham*

Potential pitfalls: Note that the so-called "dative" is not included in the list of cases for English and Danish. This is because neither language has a separate form to mark the "recipient" – which typically functions as the indirect object. As the above examples demonstrate, both the indirect object and the direct object are realized as the same form in English (e.g. him) and Danish (e.g. ham).

Gender: In English, gender is noticeable primarily in the third person singular personal pronouns:

- masculine (masc): ENGLISH*: he, him, his;*   DANISH: *han, ham, hans*

- feminine (fem):   ENGLISH *she, her, hers;*   DANISH: *hun, hende, hendes*

- neuter (neut):   ENGLISH *it, its*   DANISH: *den/det, dens/dets*

However, there are a few other areas where English makes a distinction between masculine and feminine gender. One of these involves the suffix *-ess*, which marks a noun as feminine (contrast e.g. *lion* and *lioness*; *steward* and *stewardess*; *prince* and *princess*). Sometimes the distinction is built into contrasting members of word pairs. This is particularly true within the animal kingdom: *bull* (masc), *cow* (fem); *stallion* (masc), *mare* (fem) – but it is not restricted to this part of the vocabulary: Contrast, for example, *king* vs. *queen*.

As already noted (under the section on the article), Danish uses the articles to make a very regular and extensive distinction between common gender (*en/den*) and neuter gender (*et/det*):

- en/den + *kjole, ske, arm, næse, mand, kvinde, banan, dør, seng, kat, hund, so, hest, kanin*

- et/det + *hus, glas, ben, ansigt, barn, æble, vindue, egern, firben, får, svin, føl, næsehorn*

As the Danish examples clearly demonstrate, grammatical gender is not to be confused with real world reference to the sexes. Although the connection is clear enough in the case of such pairs as *prince* and *princess*, and in the case of the English personal pronouns (where e.g. *he* typically refers to males, *she* to females, and *it* to "neuter" items such as *book* and *water*), it is difficult to see why, in Danish, a word like *vindue* should be neuter gender while *dør* is common gender.

The following tables summarize the data for this group of pronouns in English and Danish, respectively.

GROUP A **Independent personal pronouns (English)**	*1st person*	*2nd person*	*3rd person*
nominative case	I (sg) we (pl)	you (sg & pl)	he (masc, sg) she (fem, sg) it (neut, sg)
accusative case	me (sg) us (pl)	you (sg & pl)	him (masc, sg) her (fem, sg) it (neut, sg)
genitive case	mine (sg) ours (pl)	yours (sg & pl)	his (masc, sg) hers (fem, sg) its (neut, sg)

GROUP A **Independent personal pronouns (Danish)**	*1st person*	*2nd person*	*3rd person*
nominative case	jeg (sg) vi (pl)	du (sg, informal) I (pl, informal) De (sg & pl formal)	han (masc, sg) hun (fem, sg) den/det (neut, sg)
accusative case	mig (sg) os (pl)	dig (sg, informal) jer (pl, informal) Dem (sg & pl, formal)	ham (masc, sg) hende (fem, sg) den/det (neut, sg)
genitive case	min/mit (sg) mine (pl) vor/vort (sg, formal) vore (pl, formal) vores (sg & pl, informal)	din/dit (sg) dine (pl, informal) jeres (pl, informal) Deres (sg & pl formal	hans (masc, sg) hendes (fem, sg) dens/dets (neut, sg) deres (pl)

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Exercise 8a: Working with archaic pronouns

The following song text, "Friendly Persuasion", from the 1956 **film** of the same name, attempts to provide a sense of the old-fashioned quaintness of **Quaker** speech by employing the archaic personal pronoun, "thee". From a purely linguistic point of view, however, the text contains at least three types of errors:

- "Thee" is misused in several contexts. Which ones? What archaic pronoun form should have been used instead? Why?

- The verb form in the clause "Thee <u>is</u> mine" is also incorrect. What should it be? Why?

- The text is inconsistent in that it uses the modern second person form as a dependent (<u>your</u> bonnet, <u>your</u> cape, <u>your</u> glove). For the sake of consistency, what archaic pronoun should have been used instead? Why?

"Friendly Persuasion"

Thee I love, more than the meadow so green and still More than the mulberries on the hill More than the buds of a May apple tree, I love thee Arms have I, strong as the oak, for this occasion Lips have I, to kiss thee, too, in friendly persuasion Thee <u>is</u> mine, though I don't know many words of praise Thee pleasures me in a hundred ways Put on <u>your</u> bonnet, <u>your</u> cape, and <u>your</u> glove And come with me, for thee I love

Further reading:

Robins, R[obert] H[enry]. "The Development of the Word Class System of the European Grammatical Tradition." *Foundations of Language.* 2: 3-19. 1966.

CHAPTER 9: The "major" word classes

9.1. The noun (VISL abbreviation: n, VISL color: dark blue)

9.2. The verb (VISL abbreviation: v, VISL color: red)

9.3. The adjective (VISL abbreviation: adj, VISL color: dark green)

9.4. The adverb (VISL abbreviation: adv, VISL color: orange)

CHAPTER 10: Other word classes

10.1. The infinitive marker (VISL abbreviation: infm, VISL color: orange)

This word class has only one member. In English the relevant item is <u>to</u>, in Danish it is <u>at</u>.

Characteristics: The infinitive marker typically introduces the infinitive form of the verb:

- ENGLISH*: <u>to</u> be, <u>to</u> do, <u>to</u> have, <u>to</u> understand*

- DANISH: *<u>at</u> være, <u>at</u> lave, <u>at</u> have, <u>at</u> forstå*

Many grammarians do not include this word class at all in their system. Instead they simply treat constructions such as *to be* and *at være* as "verbs", making no distinction between e.g. *to be* and *be*. The VISL philosophy, however, is that every word should belong to some word class. Since both *to* and *at* are clearly words in their own right (separate from the verb they introduce) they warrant classification.

Potential pitfalls: In both English and Danish the infinitive marker is identical in form to a word belonging to another word class. In English the competition comes from the preposition, <u>to</u> (as in *He went <u>to</u> Rome*); in Danish the

competitor is the subordinating conjunction, *at* (as in *Jeg ved, at du kan høre mig*).

To avoid this pitfall, remember that the infinitive marker introduces **verbs**, while prepositions typically introduce nouns (*to Rome*), pronouns (*to me*), or groups (*to my mother*), and subordinating conjunctions typically introduce clauses (*Jeg ved, at du kan høre mig; Vi håber, at han snart dukker op.*). Functionally, therefore, the infinitive marker differs markedly from prepositions and subordinating conjunctions. This difference is easily captured by means of VISL's colon notation – D:infm, H:prp, SUB:conj. Note that while both the infinitive marker and the preposition are part of group structure, the former functions as a dependent (D), while the latter functions as a head (H). Contrast the following analyses:

- *to go* (D:infm + H:v)

- *to Rome* (H:prp + D:n)

Another grammatical issue that is relevant in this context is the so-called **SPLIT INFINITIVE**, as in the following example:

"He disciplined himself <u>to</u> **only** <u>want</u> the things that were possible to have." (Patchett, 2001:254)

ACCUSATIVE WITH INFINITIVE (potential for ambiguity)

 "Once the plans were made, Carmen left Gen to watch television with the other soldiers. There she saw a repeat performance of *The Story of Maria*." (Ann Patchett, Bel Canto, Perennial, 2001:253)

10.2. The interjection (VISL abbreviation: intj, VISL color: flesh colored)

This word class is not well-defined. It is a collection bin for expressions that hover on the periphery of the vocabulary of a given language. Are interjections real "words" or not?

Characteristics: It is not possible to say how many members this class contains, since there is no general agreement on what counts as an interjection. However, it is fair to say that the typical interjection expresses some sort of emotional outburst or "noise", but other expressions are also often included in this class:

- ENGLISH*: ow, ouch, oops, gosh, golly, whoops, wow, bow-wow, arf, yes, no, OK, hello, hi*

- DANISH: *av, halløjsa, hovsa, uf, vov vov, mjav, rap rap, ja, nej, jo, dav, hej*

In the VISL system, interjections are treated functionally as adverbials, so the colon notation for the interjection is A:intj.

10.3. The numeral (VISL abbreviation: num, VISL color: light green)

There are two basic types of numerals (or number): **CARDINAL** (one, two, three) and **ORDINAL** (first, second, third). The first group contains numbers which indicate "how many", while the second group contains numbers which indicate "order" in a series:

- **cardinal numbers**

   o ENGLISH: *zero, one, two, three, fifty, sixty-three, one thousand*

   o DANISH: *nul, en, to, tre, halvtreds, to og fyrre, hundrede*

- **ordinal numbers**

   o ENGLISH: *first, second, third, fourth, fifth, tenth, fiftieth, billionth, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th*

   o DANISH: *første, anden/andet, tredje, fjerde, femte, sjette, syvende*

- **other types of numbers**

   -12, 1001, VIII, IX, 50 %, 2004, 2^5, 10^{-9}

   10,451.52 (English punctuation)*, 10,451,52* (Danish punctuation)

Basic characteristics: Numerals of all types are, for the most part, easily recognized. An interesting philosophical question to consider is the following: How large is the class of numerals? One might be tempted at first to argue that the class is unlimited in size, since there is no largest number in either the cardinal or the ordinal series. This is true for both English and Danish. To any number which one might claim is the largest, a larger number can be

constructed simply by adding one (e.g. 1,998,776,062 + 1 = 1,998,776,063). However, if we consider the actual words we use to name the number, we get a different view of the set – we actually use a very small group of words to name any number we come up with. Thus, large as it may be, 1,998,776,062 can be read as "one nine nine eight seven seven zero six two zero" – using only seven different words in all. Even if we read the number as "one billion nine hundred and ninety eight million, seven hundred and seventy six thousand and sixty two", we have used only ten different words for numerals (plus the conjunction, "and"). So the actual set of numeral names is really quite small. Occasionally a new numeral is coined – particularly in response to the need for labelling the increasingly large (*kilo*-byte, *mega*-byte, *giga*-byte) and small (*milli*-gram, *micro*-gram, *nano*-second) numbers required to measure the size and speed of components in the fields of e.g. astronomy, biology, chemistry, electronics, and physics. Other examples of coinages which are potential members of the numeral class come from everyday usage, including slang:

- *ENGLISH: dozen* (12), *score* (20)

- *DANISH: dusin* (12), *snes* (20), *tusse* (1000 kr.), *plovmand* (500 kr.)

Observe that several of these words might equally be classified as nouns. This is also true of the common names for coins and bills (English: *penny, nickel, dime, quarter, dollar, pence, pound, tenner, fiver*; Danish: *øre*, *krone*). Overlapping class membership, when seen from the point of view of rigorous scientific method, is a frustrating fact of real life and the real world (are transvestites male or female? How do we classify people who have undergone a sex change (which pronoun should we use: *he* or *she*, *han* or *hun*)?

Ordinal numbers: Note that both English and Danish make use of suffixes to mark the ordinal numbers. In English, the basic suffix is *-th*, starting with *fourth* (cp. *fifth, sixth, tenth, hundredth, ten billionth*). The main exceptions are the first three ordinal numbers (*first, second, third*) and those numbers ending with one of these three (*forty-first, seventy second, ninety-third*). In Danish, the basic suffixes for ordinal numbers are *-te* (*første*, *femte*, *sjette*, *ellevte*, *tolvte*, *femogtredivete*) and *-ende* (*syvende*, *ottende*, *niende*, *tiende*, *trettende*, *treogtyvende*). As is the case in English, Danish has its exceptions: (*anden/andet, tredje, fjerde*). Of course, English has many words ending in the suffix *-th* which are not ordinal numbers. One such group involves terms of measurement (*depth, length, width, breadth*), but there are others as well (*health, wealth, stealth*). Similarly, Danish has many words ending in the suffix *-te* (*følte, delte, læste*) and *-ende* (*flyvende, sygende, liggende*) which are not ordinal numbers. But while it might be difficult to instruct a computer

to distinguish such forms from ordinal numbers, an appeal to meaning alone will allow speakers of English and Danish to make the distinction easily.

Fractions are made up of two numbers, one above the other (e.g., 1/2, 3/4): the top number (e.g. 1, 3) is called the **NUMERATOR**, while the bottom number (e.g. 2, 4) is the **DENOMINATOR**. Note that when reading a fraction aloud, one reads the numerator as a cardinal number and the denominator as an ordinal (the main exception is ½, which is read in English as "one half" or "a half" (rather than as "one second") and in Danish as "en halv" (rather than as "en/et anden/andet"):

- *ENGLISH: two thirds, three fourths, seven tenths, ninety-nine one hundredths*

- *DANISH: en tredjedel, tre fjerdedele, syv tiendedele, ni og halvfems hundrededele*

As the above lists illustrate, English treats fractions whose numerator is larger than one as plural forms, adding the suffix *–s* to the fraction (contrast e.g. *one third*, *one fiftieth*), while Danish adds the noun *del/dele* to the fraction.

Potential pitfalls: The fact that English *first* and Danish *første* belong to the ordinal numbers gives rise to the following question: What about English *last* and Danish *sidste*? These words are best viewed as adjectives rather than as numerals.

12. References

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