

## Structure of the Danish phrase

The key to the understanding of the Danish phrase is the relative position of verb (in present or past), **v**, subject, **s**, and adverbs like "ikke" (not), **a** in the first part of the phrase. The far end of the phrase is less important – in the following it will be treated as "the rest", **r**, unless otherwise indicated.

Jeg spiste ikke kippers til morgenmad den dag på hotellet

**s v a ----- r -----**

*(I did not have kippers for breakfast that day at the hotel)*

Danish phrases have three possible sequences of **v**, **s** and **a**. The sequence conveys the function of the phrase and the structure of the period.

## Subordinate clause and main clause (ledsætning og helsætning)

main clause

subordinate clause

main clause

(1) Jeg taler altid dansk, (3) når jeg ikke er i skole.

**s v a**

**s a v**

(3) Når jeg ikke er i skole, (2) taler jeg altid dansk.

**v s a**

**(whatever)**

**A subordinate clause** is a phrase that serves as an element in the main clause – as phrase 3 serves as the time element in 1 and 2 above. It may also serve as object or a describing element:

- I still live in the town **where I was born** (**description of place**)
- He said **that he would come** (**object**)
- The man, **who wore a gun**, made me calm down. (**description of person**)

Thus a subordinate clause is a phrase, which is part of a phrase. In opposition to the main clause a Danish subordinate clause does not change much, it always has the structure: Subject, adverb, verb: **s a v**.

**The main clause** is the framework of a period – top of the sentence hierarchy. And like in English, the elements of the main clause can change place dependent of focus:

- I have bought my hat in London.

**s v**

- In London I have bought my hat, in Paris my shoes.

**s v**

### **Inversion**

In Danish, however, any change that involves the first field (**the whatever field**) of the main clause will change the word order. The word order of the main clause is either: (1) **sva** or (2) **whatever - vsa**: A Danish phrase has room for only one element before the verb: either subject, **s**, or **whatever** other element: time or place or a subordinate clause or an object . See table below.

<b>Whatever</b>	<b>v s a</b>
I morgen <b>(time)</b>	har vi igen fri.
I København <b>(place)</b>	er alting ( ) dyrt.
Opvasken <b>(object)</b>	tager vi bare i morgen

Like in English the structure of a phrase carries meaning and function:

1. You were there. (statement)

**s v**

2. Were you there? (question)

**v s**

3. I asked you if you were there. (question referred)

**s v**

4. She wanted me to leave. So I did. (= I therefore left)

**s v**

5. She wanted to leave. So did I. (= I wanted to leave too)

**v s**

As you see, the meaning of these phrases changes with the sequence of the subject, **s**, and the verb in present/past, **v**. The first three examples follow general generative principles of the English language – as of the Danish. The last example is a freak in English, but shows a general principle of Danish called inversion: The word order is like that of a question: **v s**, but the phrase is no question. The changed word order describes how the two sentences are connected in the text. As far as I know, sentence # 5 is the only example in English where not inverting would ruin the meaning. Another, more harmless, example of inversion you would find in old literature:

6. - Come with me, said he, - I will show you my stamp collection.

**v s**

7. - Come with me, he said, I will show you my stamp collection.

**s v**

In English, the difference between phrase #6 and #7 is merely one of style; both phrases are correct. But in Danish only #6 would be correct. For a Danish native speaker, interchanging of **v** and **s** in #6 would be as confusing as interchanging in #4 and #5 would be for an English. In Danish you would have to say:

- Kom, sagde han, jeg vil vise dig min frimærkesamling.

**v s**