

THE PLACEMENT OF ADVERBS IN PRINCIPAL AND  
SUBORDINATE CLAUSES  
IN ENGLISH AND SWEDISH

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In English there is not much difference between principal and subordinate clauses as regards adverb placement. The differences that do occur are sometimes due to structural constraints, as when we cannot have adverbs in clause-initial position in relative clauses where the relative word is subject, e. g. in (1).

(1) John, who *unfortunately* had not been able to come, did not get anything.

Here *unfortunately* has to be placed after *who* although it normally occurs clause-initially. Sometimes a difference in placement is limited to a particular adverb. For example, *ever* never occurs in the initial position in principal clauses, whereas this position can very well be used in certain subordinate clauses, as in *b* and *c* of (2).

(2) a. \**Ever* Dick comes back.

b. Dick will be punished if *ever* he comes back.

c. Come back as soon as *ever* you can.

In Swedish it is a normal feature for a large number of adverbs to be differently placed in principal and subordinate clauses in relation to finite auxiliaries and finite verbs.<sup>1</sup> In principal clauses post-position in relation to these constituents is the rule, while in subordinate clauses pre-position dominates. Example (3) illustrates this shifting, which is imitated in the English versions, although it is here not associated with the change of clause type.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wijk-Andersson (1977 : 1-2) with its reference to Beckman (1955 : § 225), Collinder (1974 : §§ 796-808), Wessén (1968 : 212-213), Thorell (1973 : §§ 772-773), and Nylund-Brodde and Holm (1972 : § 907).

- (3) a. Peter har *alltid* varit vänlig mot mig.  
Peter has *always* been kind to me.  
b. Jag tycker om Peter, därför att han *alltid* har varit vänlig mot mig.  
I like Peter because he *always* has been kind to me.

Let us now try to use the opposite order in both the Swedish and English versions of (3).

- (4) a. \*Peter *alltid* har varit vänlig mot mig.  
Peter *always* has been kind to me.  
b. Jag tycker om Peter, därför att han har *alltid* varit vänlig mot mig.  
I like Peter because he has *always* been kind to me.

Here we note first of all that the pre-position of *alltid* in (4a) is ungrammatical. Moreover, this adverb can take up post-position in a subordinate clause only in case the clause content is asserted as in (4b), where *därför att* can be replaced by *ty* 'for', (Cf. Andersson 1975:18—19; 61—62). In English, where the shifting is not due to clause type, the order *always has* often has an emphasizing function, but it is sometimes, especially in American English, used with no more emphasis than the order *has always*.<sup>2</sup>

Only certain Swedish adverbs, e.g. *bara* 'simply' and *kanske* 'perhaps', can take up the position of *alltid* in (4a) in a principal clause. See (5) and (6).

- (5) Han *bara* har uteblivit.  
He *simply* has stayed away.  
(6) Hon *kanske* har missförstått dig.  
She *perhaps* has misunderstood you.

Let us now study the possibility of placing an adverb into a verb phrase with a compound auxiliary, as in (7) and (8).

- (7) a. \*Jag *aldrig* skulle ha försökt att fly, även om jag haft chansen.  
I *never* would have tried to escape, even if I had had the chance.  
b. Jag skulle *aldrig* ha försökt att fly, ...  
I would *never* have tried to escape, ...  
c. \*Jag skulle ha *aldrig* försökt att fly, ...  
I would have *never* tried to escape, ...

- (8) Han var den typ av fånge  
He was the type of prisoner

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting in this connection that English also has certain principal-clause phenomena that can occur in subordinate clauses when the speaker desires to be understood as committed to the truth these clauses express. Compare, for example, (i) and (ii), which have been borrowed from Green (1976:384).

(i) \*Bobby realized that *frankly*, he never had a chance.  
(ii) I'm afraid that *frankly*, he hasn't a chance.

- (a) som *aldrig* skulle ha försökt att fly, även om han haft chansen.  
who *never* would have tried to escape, even if he had had the chance.  
(b) \*som skulle *aldrig* ha försökt att fly, ...  
who would *never* have tried to escape, ...  
(c) \*som skulle ha *aldrig* försökt att fly, ...  
who would have *never* tried to escape, ...

The relative clause in (8) is not an assertion, and therefore Swedish would hardly have *aldrig* in post-position in relation to *skulle* or *ha*. In the English version of (7) and (8) the unusual position of *never* after a compound auxiliary gives it a certain emphasis. As regards the pre-position of *never* in the English versions, compare what is said above about *always has* in (4a).

In (3)—(4) and (7)—(8) the English adverb is less restricted in its placement in relation to auxiliaries than the corresponding Swedish adverb and this is also true of many other types of adverbs. There are, however, English adverbs that are more restricted than their Swedish equivalents, namely verb-modifying adverbs of degree and manner. Compare, for example:

- (9) a. \*Han *fullständigt* måste ha glömt det.  
\*He *completely* must have forgotten it.  
b. Han måste *fullständigt* ha glömt det.  
\*He must *completely* have forgotten it.  
c. Han måste ha *fullständigt* glömt det.  
He must have *completely* forgotten it.  
(10) a. Hans fru säger att han *fullständigt* måste ha glömt det.  
\*His wife says that he *completely* must have forgotten it.  
b. Hans fru säger att han måste *fullständigt* ha glömt det.  
\*His wife says that he must *completely* have forgotten it.  
c. Hans fru säger att han måste ha *fullständigt* glömt det.  
His wife says that he must have *completely* forgotten it.

In English, adverbs modifying the main verb cannot precede finite or nonfinite auxiliaries.<sup>3</sup> Swedish is less restricted in this respect, which may be further illustrated by (11) with the manner adverb *direkt* and (12) with the degree adverb *helt* in the pre-auxiliary position.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting, however, that certain finite auxiliaries themselves can sometimes be modified by verb-modifying adverbs. These can then stand in pre-position as in (i), where the state of volition expressed by *would* is modified by *very much*, or in post-position, as in (ii), where the possibility denoted by *can* is characterized as being within easy reach. See Jacobson (1975:456—458) and (1978:54, 56). Cf. Quirk et al. (1972:451).

(i) I *very much* would prefer to stay at home.  
(ii) Such a situation *can easily* be imagined.

- (11) ...växter som *direkt*  
 kan ta upp kväve ur luften. (Dagens Nyheter, 14 Dec. 1978)  
 ...plants which can *directly* take up nitrogen from the air.
- (12) Det är obegripligt hur rapporten ... *helt* har kunnat bortse  
 från den ... glädje som dansen innebär för barn.  
 (Svenska Dagbladet, 3 Jan. 1979)  
 It is incomprehensible that the report should have *totally*  
 ignored the joy that dancing is to children.

In both (11) and (12) the Swedish adverb can alternatively be placed after the finite auxiliary and in (12) also between the auxiliaries. In my opinion all the three versions of (13) and four versions of (14) are likewise acceptable, whereas their English translations (15) and (16) show that the choice of position in English is restricted to placement after or immediately before the main verb.

- (13) a. Han är en man som *dyrt* har måst betala för sitt misstag.  
 b. Han är en man som har *dyrt* måst betala för sitt misstag.  
 c. Han är en man som har måst *dyrt* betala för sitt misstag.
- (14) Det är otroligt att denna stora borg  
 (a) *fullständigt* ska ha blivit jämnad med marken.  
 (b) ska *fullständigt* ha blivit jämnad med marken.  
 (c) ska ha *fullständigt* blivit jämnad med marken.  
 (d) ska ha blivit *fullständigt* jämnad med marken.
- (15) He is a man who has had to pay *dearly* for his mistake.  
 (16) It is unbelievable that this big castle should have been *completely*  
 levelled with the ground.

As far as I can judge, none of the adverb positions in (13) and (14) makes the adverb essentially more prominent than the others do. Nor is the meaning changed in any way. Version *a* would no doubt be most people's choice, especially in writing. The important thing here, however, is not frequency but acceptability.

What can be the reason for this movability of Swedish verb-modifying adverbs in relation to auxiliaries? It is especially striking in subordinate clauses, but occurs, as shown by (9 b and c), also in principal clauses, though to a lesser extent. Syntactic variation where no special difference in prominence or meaning is involved is a sign that a change is going on. Word order variation of this type can be expected in Swedish, which from a typological point of view is in a state of transition from SOV to SVO order. It can also be expected in English, which is described by Lehmann (1973:50) as an "inconsistent VO language". Among word-order features of consistent OV and VO languages we may note (cf. Vennemann 1974:79):

- | OV                        | VO                        |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| (a) object — verb         | (a) verb — object         |
| (b) adverbial — verb      | (b) verb — adverbial      |
| (c) main verb — auxiliary | (c) auxiliary — main verb |

Swedish sentences exemplifying the OV order can easily be found:

- (17) De har ingenting lärt och ingenting glömt. (a).  
 They have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing (literally 'nothing learnt and nothing forgotten')
- (18) De har fullständigt missuppfattat det hela. (b).  
 They have completely misunderstood the whole thing.
- (19) Han har gjort allt som tänkas kan. (c).  
 He has done everything imaginable (literally 'that be imagined can')

While the adverbial-verb order of (18) is common both in Swedish and English, the OV features of (17) and (19) have no counterpart in present-day English. In Swedish they sound a bit old-fashioned and only occur in certain contexts. In earlier stages of both English and Swedish they were, however, quite frequent. As far as these particular word-order features are concerned it appears, then, that English is slightly in advance of Swedish in the development towards a more consistent VO language.

Let us now as a typological game give the relative clause in (11) consistent OV order as far as the above features are concerned:

- (20) ...växter som kväve ur luften direkt uppta kan.  
 ...plants which nitrogen from the air directly uptake can.

If we use this clause to illustrate the historical development from SOV to SVO word order in Swedish, we may set up the following series of changes, which Swedish shares with English:

- (21) a. The auxiliary is moved to the position immediately before the main verb. This change has the consequence that the adverb comes to take up pre-position in relation to the auxiliary:  
 ...växter som kväve ur luften direkt kan uppta.  
 ...plants which nitrogen from the air directly can uptake.
- b. The strong object and adverbial phrase are moved to the final position. Here, they receive more prominence than in mid-position, but the movement has also a disambiguating function since it makes it quite clear that *som* (*which*) is subject and *kväve* (*nitrogen*) object:  
 ...växter som direkt kan uppta kväve ur luften.  
 ...plants which directly can uptake nitrogen from the air.

- c. The adverbial particle in *uppta* (*uptake*) is moved to post-position. This is a change that is ongoing for Swedish *uppta* but completed for English *uptake*.<sup>4</sup> Though forms like *ta upp* were originally felt as informal, they are becoming more frequent also in Swedish formal prose.

...växter som direkt kan ta upp kväve ur luften (=11).

...plants which directly can take up nitrogen from the air.

A further change that has not taken place in the Swedish version of (11) but is optional in Swedish and compulsory in English is movement of *direkt* (*directly*) to the position before the main verb, as in (22).

(22) ...växter som kan direkt ta upp kväve ur luften.

...plants which can directly take up nitrogen from the air. (=11)

All historical changes of these types in Swedish have not taken place precisely as suggested above. For example in (23) change *b* has taken place but not *a*.

- (23) Han är den största idiot som tänkas kan på den här sidan jordklotet.  
He is the greatest idiot imaginable (literally 'that be imagined can') on this side of the globe.

In texts from earlier periods of English it is possible to find examples of the same variable placement of verb-modifying adverbs in relation to auxiliaries as in present-day Swedish, e.g.

- (24) Ða on ðam timan þe se cristena and se gode theodosius *fullice* on god ælmihtigne wæs belyfed 'Then at the time when the Christian and good Theodosius was *fully* trusting in God'  
(*The Seven Sleepers*, beginning of the 11th century)
- (25) ...hystoryes which *gretely* haue proufftyed oure mortal lyf 'stories which have *greatly* profited our mortal life' (*The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, latter part of the 15th century)

As shown by (9a) and 10a), Swedish principal clauses differ from subordinate ones in not allowing verb-modifying adverbs to prepose a finite auxiliary or verb, and one might ask why this difference obtains. A plausible explanation can be found in Givón's statement (1976) that "main clauses (and in particular declarative-affirmative ones) are the most progressive, innovative environment in language, where innovations are first introduced and from where they

<sup>4</sup> Webster's Third New International Dictionary has an entry for this verb, which it classifies as obsolete or Scottish.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also Ross' "Penthouse Principle" (1973: 397), according to which more goes on upstairs (i.e. in principal clauses) than downstairs (i.e. in subordinate clauses), and Emonds' root and structure-preserving transformations, the former of which only, or chiefly, apply to principal clauses (Emonds 1976).

spread later on into other environments".<sup>5</sup> If, as has been assumed above, pre-auxiliary placement of verb-modifying adverbs in Swedish is due to the change described in (21a), then the innovation of restoring the original contiguity between adverb and verb can first be expected in principal clauses, and in fact such contiguity is now the norm in these clauses. That the innovation, however, is beginning to spread into subordinate clauses is demonstrated by (13) and (14) and the possibility of moving *direkt* in (11) and *helt* in (12) to the post-auxiliary position. Perhaps in the course of time Swedish will reach the more advanced stage of English, where the contiguity of a verb-modifying adverb and its verb has been fully restored in subordinate as well as in principal clauses.

In the banning of the pre-auxiliary position for Swedish verb-modifying adverbs in principal clauses another factor also seems to have played an important role, namely the factor that can be assumed to have caused the same kind of ban for non-verb-modifiers like *alltid* and *aldrig*, e.g. in (4a) and (7a). A plausible explanation of this ban is that in the progressive declarative principal clauses the finite auxiliary has not remained in the position described in (21a), i.e. immediately before the main verb, but moved further to the position of second constituent in the clause, as in (26).

- (26) a. Han *har* alltid varit snäll och lydig.  
He has always been good and obedient.  
b. Alltid *har* han varit snäll och lydig.  
Always he has been good and obedient.  
c. Martin *har* jag aldrig sett.  
Martin I have never seen.  
d. Till John *har* jag aldrig gett något.  
To John I have never given anything.

This position is also taken by the finite verb, as in (27).

- (27) a. Laura *kommer* alltid.  
Laura always comes.  
b. Alltid *kommer* du till mig med dina klagomål.  
Always you come to me with your complaints.  
c. Martin *ser* jag aldrig.  
Martin I never see.  
d. Till John *ger* jag aldrig något.  
To John I never give anything.

This tendency for the finite auxiliary or verb to be the second constituent of a declarative principal clause is found in all Germanic languages with the exception of English (Cf. Rahkonen 1974: 60 and Bynon 1977: 156).

What we are now witnessing is a similar development in those Swedish subordinate clauses which most resemble principal clauses, namely those containing assertions, as in (4b).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> According to Wessén (1965 : 334), the systematic distinction between the word order of principal and subordinate clauses that is broken by this development did not become a regular feature of Swedish until the modern period. Therefore we can very well find occasional instances of post-auxiliary placement of adverbs in subordinate clauses in medieval texts, e.g. in the following extract from Patrikssagan (St. Patrick's tale) of the 13th century.

(i) ... han ... iäfuadhe storlica at han sculle *älre* väl koma the brona 'he feared greatly that he would never get over that bridge' (S. Patriksagen, Samlingar utgivna av Svenska Fornskriftssällskapet, Part I, Stockholm 1844 : 19).

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