

Habitual aspect in Danish

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Overview

1. Introduction
2. Properties of *pleje*
3. Test 1: Occurrence in complement clauses
4. Test 2: Scope of modifiers
 - 4.1. Habitual within the scope of modifiers
 - 4.2. Habitual scoping over modifiers
5. Cooccurrence and interpretation
 - 5.1. Cooccurrence with habitual modifiers
 - 5.2. Same or varying participants
 - 5.3. Interpretation of *pleje* according to layers
6. Conclusions and open questions

References

1. Introduction

- Investigation of *pleje*, the most important habitual expression in Present-day Danish
- Rather limited research on this, e.g. brief remarks in Lundskær & Holmes (2010: 292, 295) and Hansen & Heltoft (2011: 1431–1432, 1436); further refs. in Gregersen et al. (2021: 41)
- Followed the questionnaire by Hengeveld (ms.), v. 27. Oct 2021
 - Two tests: occurrence in complement clauses and scope of modifiers
- Sources of examples
 - KorpusDK (various written genres, c. 107 mio. words) – references consist of year and source
 - LANCHART corpus (transcribed sociolinguistic interviews) – references consist of ‘LANCHART’ plus the corpus identifier
 - Google searches – references consist of web address
- Main conclusion so far: *pleje*’s canonical function is the expression of habitual/regular occurrence of episodes (ep) or states of affairs (e) in FDG terms

2. Properties of *pleje*

- Central habitual in Present-day Danish: secondary/catenative (‘auxiliary’) verb *pleje*. Other (more marginal/lexical) expressions one might consider:
 - Predicative expressions *være tilbøjelig til* ‘be inclined to’, *have for vane* ‘be in the habit’, *være vant til* ‘be accustomed to’
 - A number of frequentative/iterative adverbs which may cooccur with *pleje*, e.g. *tit* ‘often’, *ofte* ‘often’, *altid* ‘always’, *som regel* ‘as a rule, as usual’
 - Probably the adverb *gerne* ‘preferably, generally, etc.’ (cf. Fang’s presentation on habituais from ‘like’)
 - In earlier Danish and traditional dialects also *bruge* ‘use’ (ODS, s.v. *bruge*, 4.2; JO, s.v. *bruge*², 6), cf. Swedish *bruka* (and English). This is obsolete in the modern standard language
- *Pleje* borrowed from Middle Low German *plegen* in the late Middle Ages (ODS, s.v. *pleje*²). Two clearly distinct functions at least since the 15th century (KO, s.v. *plege*):
 - habitual ‘usually do, used to’ (+ *at*-infinitive)
 - ‘care for, attend to, nurture’ (+ NP object)
- *Pleje* frequently used and stylistically unmarked in written as well as spoken language – unlike its counterparts in German and Dutch (Gregersen et al. 2021)
- Inflected for tense, cf. (1)–(3) below. (Though periphrastic perfects like [3] appear to be infrequent.)
 - But: apparently virtually never used in the infinitive. No examples in KorpusDK and LANCHART, only dubious examples found on Google.
 - Hence, the complement clause test is more appropriate for *pleje* than for English *used to* (see Hengeveld et al. 2021), but problematic with expressions requiring an infinitival complement.

(1) *Jeg tror, de unge mennesker **plej-er** at sige, det har været en okay dag*
 I think the young people PLEJE-PRS to say it has been an okay day
 'I think young people usually say they have had an "okay" day.' (2008 *Information*)

(2) *jeg **plej-ede** altid at bank-e min fætter*
 I PLEJE-PST always to beat_up-INF my cousin(M)
 'I used to always beat up my cousin' (LANCHART, koege3gl-06-MAH_dansk)

(3) *Vi har **plej-et** at sig-e, at hvert femte år kommer der et smæk*
 we have PLEJE-PTCP to say-INF that every fifth year comes there a blow
 'We used to say [until recently] that every five years there would be a [financial] blow'
 lit.: 'We have used to say...' (agriwatch.dk)

- Important property noted by Hansen & Heltoft (2011: 1432): *pleje* is not subject selecting, i.e. it does not place semantic restrictions on its subject. Hence it may be used e.g. with inanimate subjects (4), in passives (5), and with zero-place predicates such as weather verbs (6).

- The dependency analysis proposed by Hansen & Heltoft is shown in Figure 1 below.

(4) *Risengrød **plejer** at være en stor succes til børnehavens sommerfest*
 rice_pudding PLEJE.PRS to be a big success at kindergarten.DEF.GEN summer_party
 'Rice pudding is usually very popular at the kindergarten's summer party' (slyngebarn.dk)

(5) *Jeg **plejede** at blive set ned på, fordi mine forældre var kunstnere*
 I PLEJE.PST to become looked down on because my parents were artists
 'I used to be looked down on because my parents were artists' (2008 *Information*)

(6) *Faktisk **plejer** det at regne og lyne på min fødselsdag*
 in_fact PLEJE.PRS it to rain and lighten on my birthday
 'In fact there is usually rain and lighting on my birthday' (maschavang.dk)

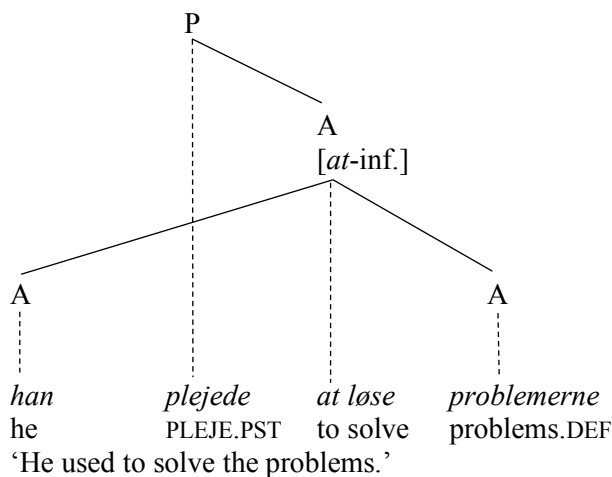


Figure 1: Analysis of *pleje* by Hansen & Heltoft (2011: 1436)

- However, Hansen & Heltoft (2011: 1436) also suggest (without examples) that *pleje* may be subject selecting if it is interpreted 'be in the habit'. Open question whether this interpretation actually occurs.

3. Test 1: Occurrence in complement clauses

- Can the strategy occur in the complement clause of propositional attitude predicates such as *believe* or *think*, or predicates of knowledge and acquisition of knowledge, such as *know* or *realize*? → at most p
- (7) *Han vurderer, at de plejer at kunne tage 60 - 80.000 kroner med hjem*
he estimates that they PLEJE.PRS to can.INF take.INF 60 – 80,000 DKK with home
'He estimates that they are usually able to take home between 60,000 and 80,000 DKK [in profits from a festival]' (tv2lorry.dk)
- (8) *jeg mener at det plejer at være hanhunde der er så store*
I think that it PLEJE.PRS to be male_dogs REL are so big
'I think it's usually male dogs that are so big' (LANCHART, naestved1ny-05-BKO)
- Can the strategy occur in the complement clause of commentative (factive) predicates such as *regret*, *be odd*, or *like*? → at most ep
- (9) *Det er mærkeligt at alle sælgerne plejer at overperforme og nu er der lukket*
it is odd that all salesmen.DEF PLEJE.PRS to overperform and now is there closed
'It's odd that all your salesmen usually overperform and now everything is closed [i.e. they do not sell anything anymore]' (linkedin.com)
- (10) *Derfor er jeg også glad for, at der plejer at komme mange tillidsrepræsentanter*
thus am I also glad for that there PLEJE.PRS to come many union.stewards
'For this reason I am also glad that many union stewards usually attend [these meetings]' (co-industri.dk)
- Can the strategy occur in the complement clause of manipulative predicates such as *cause* or *trigger*, or predicates of immediate perception such as *witness*? → at most e
 - No: **få nogen til at pleje at ...* 'get someone to usually do...', **se nogen pleje at ...* 'watch someone usually do...' – but these require an infinitival complement
 - A few potential examples found on Google are obviously not native Danish: *at få dig til at pleje at samarbejde* (gear4music.dk), probably automatically translated from English *to get you used to cooperating*, etc.
- Can the strategy occur in the complement clause of phasal predicates such as *begin*, *continue*, or *finish*? → at most f^c
 - No: **begynde at pleje at ...* 'begin to usually do...', **holde op med at pleje at ...* 'finish usually doing...' – but most (all?) such predicates require an infinitive phrase
- Conclusion from the complement clause test: examples of *pleje* which must be at or below p and ep. Test does not work well for the e and f^c layers

4. Test 2: Scope of modifiers

4.1. Habitual within the scope of modifiers

- Can the strategy occur **within** the semantic scope of reportative adverbials such as *reportedly* or *allegedly*, or adverbials of subjective attitude such as *(un)fortunately*? → at most p

- (11) *ved godt han angiveligt plejer at være hård ved rookies*
know EMPH he allegedly PLEJE.PRS to be.INF hard on rookies
'I'm well aware that people say he [a basketball player] is usually hard on rookies'
lit.: 'I do know that he is allegedly usually hard on rookies' (nbafantasy.dk)
- (12) *Heldigvis plejer flittige spillere at være gode til at indrapportere fejl*
fortunately PLEJE.PRS diligent players to be.INF good at to report.INF errors
'Fortunately diligent players [of a particular computer game] are usually good at reporting errors' (2008 Wikipedia)
- Can the strategy occur **within** the semantic scope of subjective epistemic adverbials such as *probably* or *certainly*? → at most ep
 - Obvious candidate for this test: *måske* 'maybe, perhaps', but this is tricky because it is also used as a mitigator (e.g. in questions and directives)
- (13) *Du plejer sikkert at stalke nogle af dine yndlingsinfluencers for at hente inspiration*
you PLEJE.PRS probably to stalk some of your favourite_influencers for to get inspiration
'You probably sometimes stalk some of your favourite influencers in order to get some inspiration' (elle.dk)
- (14) *stedet var fyldt, hvilket det givetvis plejer at være på fredage samt lørdage*
place.DEF was full which it surely PLEJE.PRS to be on Fridays and Saturdays
'the place was full, which I guess it usually is on Fridays and Saturdays' (mangospot.dk)

- Can the strategy occur **within** the semantic scope of absolute temporal adverbials such as *yesterday*, *tomorrow*, or *last year*? → at most e

- (15) *Sidste år plejede vi at tage hen i den anden ende af byen*
last year PLEJE.PST we to take over in the other end of town.DEF
for at tjekke drengene ud der
for to check guys.DEF out there
'Last year we used to go to the other side of town in order to check out the guys there'
(kulturforunge.dk)
- (16) *Sidste sommer plejede Erling at cykle ned til åen og bade*
last summer PLEJE.PST E. to cycle down to creek.DEF and bathe
'Last summer Erling used to cycle down to the creek to go bathing (books.google.com; Jensen, *Perleporten*)

- Can the strategy occur **within** the semantic scope of relative temporal adverbials such as *before summer*, *during the holidays*? → at most f^e

- No (?)

- Can the strategy occur **within** the semantic scope of aspectual adverbials such as *continually*, *ingressively*, or *completely*?

- No.

- Can the strategy occur **within** the semantic scope over narrow manner adverbials such as *badly* or *slowly*?
 - No.

4.2. Habitual scoping over modifiers

- Can the strategy have semantic scope **over** absolute temporal adverbials such as *yesterday*, *tomorrow*, or *last year*? → at least p
 - No (?)
 - Examples like (17) have the sense ‘until/as late as [the time specified by the adverbial]’ – where do these belong?

(17) {*Lena Riechert Evald har valgt toget som transportmiddel for at passe på klimaet.*}

For to år siden plejede hun at rejse langt væk,
for two years ago PLEJE.PST she to travel far away

{*for at få lagt en dæmper på rejsefeberen. Oftest var sådan en rejse lig med en længere flyrejse.*}

‘{Lena Riechert Evald has chosen the train as her means of transportation to have a lesser impact on the environment.} [Until] two years ago she used to travel far away {in order to soothe her itchy feet. Usually such a journey would require a long flight.}’ (navisen.dk)

- Can the strategy have semantic scope **over** relative temporal adverbials such as *before summer*, *during the holidays*? → at least ep

(18) {*Den omstridte præst fra Hanstholm, Ingelise Wagner har en særlig svaghed for cirkuslivet.*}

Hvert år plejer hun at følge det sønderjydske Cirkus Dannebrog
every year PLEJE.PRS she to follow the South_Jutlandic C. D.

‘{The controversial pastor from Hanstholm, Ingelise Wagner, has a special passion for the circus lifestyle.} She usually follows around the South Jutlandic *Cirkus Dannebrog* every year’ (1984 *Jydske Tidende*)

(19) {*Med et koordineret og velplanlagt angreb på regeringen smadrede den islamistiske Talebanmiliti i går morges den relative ro,*}

der om vinteren plejer at herske mellem Afghanistans stridende parter.
REL at winter.DEF PLEJE.PRS to prevail between A.GEN warring parties

‘{Yesterday morning, with a coordinated and well-planned attack on the government, the Islamist Taliban militia shattered the relative peace} which usually prevails between Afghanistan’s warring parties in the winter.’ (2009 *Politiken*)

- Can the strategy have semantic scope **over** aspectual adverbials such as *continually*, *ingressively*, or *completely*? → at least e

(20) *Stakkels fyr, han plejede at forsikre mig igen og igen ...*
poor guy he PLEJE.PST to assure me again and again

‘Poor guy, he would always assure me again and again [that I was the only one]’ (nordjyske.dk)

(21) *man plejede jo at blive færdig med sagerne i en fart*
 IMPERS PLEJE.PST PART to become done with things.DEF in a hurry
 ‘one [i.e. I] used to get things done in a hurry’ (information.dk)

- Can the strategy have semantic scope **over** narrow manner adverbials such as *badly* or *slowly*? → at least f

(22) *Jeg plejede at smøre håret grundigt ind i madolie*
 I PLEJE.PST to oil hair.DEF thoroughly in with vegetable_oil
 ‘I used to oil the [daughter’s] hair thoroughly with vegetable oil [against lice]’ (debatten.net)

(23) *hun plejede at løbe meget hurtigt i det*
 she PLEJE.PST to run very fast in it
 ‘She [a hamster] used to run very fast in it [her wheel]’ (osmedkaeledyr.dk)

- Tentative conclusion from the scope test: examples of *pleje* which must be at e at most (cf. [15]–[16]) and examples which must be at ep at least (cf. [18]–[19]).

5. Cooccurrence and interpretation

5.1. Cooccurrence with habitual modifiers

- Can different habitual markers occur in the same clause? What is the scope relation between them?
 - Yes, but one does not appear to scope over the other. In (24) and (25) the adverbs can be removed without any change in meaning.

(24) *Normalt plejer jeg at overvintre herude i skoven, men i år har*
normally PLEJE.PRS I to winter.INF out_here in forest.DEF but in year have

jeg planer om at rejse hjem til Kansas ...
I plans about to travel home to K.

‘Normally I spend the winter out here in the woods, but this year I’m planning to go back home to Kansas’ (1999 *Familie Journalen*)

(25) *når jeg har fået folk i snak, plejer jeg gerne at sige til dem ...*
when I have got people in talk PLEJE.PRS I generally to say to them
‘As soon as I’ve got people talking, I usually tell them...’ (1989 *Aarhus Stiftstidende*)

5.2. Same or varying participants

- The repeated events involve the same participant(s) → at most e

(26) *Tæt ved Saint-Médard-kirken plejede der at sidde en tigger og krybe sammen*
close by S.-M.-church.DEF PLEJE.PST there to sit a beggar and crouch together

på kanten af en udtørret brønd
on edge.DEF of a dried_up well

‘Close to the St Médard Church a beggar used to sit crouching by the edge of a dried-up well’ (books.google.com; tr. of Hugo, *Les misérables*)

- The repeated events involve varying participants → at least ep

(27) *Ja der plejer at sidde en medarbejder sammen med os under måltidet.*
yes there PLEJE.PRS to sit a staff_member together with us during meal.DEF
(Response to a questionnaire about a retirement home:) ‘Yes, a staff member usually comes to sit with us during mealtime.’ (taarnby.dk)

5.3. Interpretation of *pleje* according to layers

- The content of the utterance is always true: *Boys will be boys*.
 - *Pleje* cannot be used here; simple present used for generic statements.
- A series of States-of-Affairs occurs regularly. (Note that in the example below the friends may vary from one to the other occasion.): *Everyday Jane will come home from school and ring up the friends she's just been talking to*.
 - Translation of the English example: *Jane plejer at komme hjem fra skole og ringe til de samme venner som hun lige har snakket med*.

- An individual State of Affairs occurs regularly: *He used to take many tiny things seriously.*
 - Translation of the English example: *Han **plejede** at tage selv de mindste ting seriøst.*
- A certain type of State of Affairs occurs regularly due to a propensity of a participant involved: *He was prone to eat a lot.*
 - *Han var tilbøjelig til at spise meget.* ('was inclined to')
 - *Han havde for vane at spise meget.* ('was in the habit of')
 - *Han **plejede** at spise meget* is grammatical, but seems to be at the e layer ('this often happened')
- A State-of-Affairs consists of more than one sub-event occurring on a single occasion: *Why do you sniffle?* (versus *snif*)
 - No marking of this.

6. Conclusions and open questions

- If this analysis is on the right track, *pleje* operates at the ep and e layers. This would set it apart from e.g. English *will/would* and Spanish *soler* (which may operate at the p layer according to Hella's presentation)
- No examples found so far where *pleje* must be at the f^c layer rather than e (in contrast to e.g. *være tilbøjelig til* or *have for vane*)
 - But are there any other ways to test this?
- To do for *pleje*:
 - Analyse further examples with temporal modifiers
 - Check cooccurrence and scope with modals (cf. Hella's presentation)
 - Investigate whether infinitive *pleje* is indeed (virtually) nonexistent
- To do more generally:
 - Analyse habitual modifiers, e.g. *gerne* and *som regel*
 - Development of *pleje* and other habituais in earlier Danish

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