

Lexical restrictions on the Danish passive

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Section 1

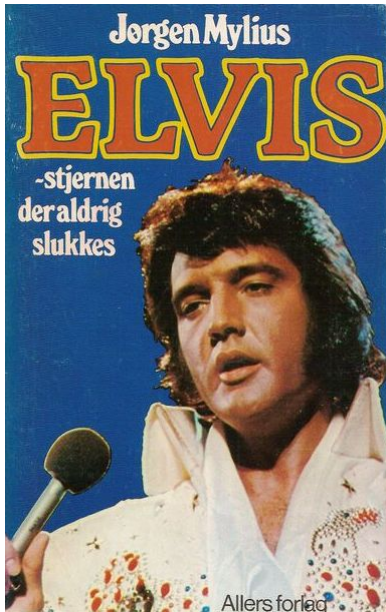
Passives in Present-Day Danish

Passives in Mainland Scandinavian (I)

- **Periphrastic passive:** *blive* ‘become’ + PTCP
 - e.g. *blive spist* ‘be eaten’; *blive hørt* ‘be heard’
- **s-passive:** stem + (past suffix +) *-(e)s*
 - e.g. *spises* ‘be eaten’; *høres* ‘be heard’
- Different distributions in Swedish, Norwegian, Danish (cf. e.g. Laanemets 2009; 2013)

Passives in Mainland Scandinavian (II)

- Periphrastic passive is the older construction
- *s*-passive developed in the Middle Ages from an older reflexive
 - REFLEXIVE → ANTICAUSATIVE → PASSIVE (see Haspelmath 1990)
- Non-passive *s*-forms ('middles') still fairly frequent:
 - e.g. *findes* 'be, exist', *skændes* 'argue', *slukkes* 'burn out, die', *slås* 'fight'



‘Elvis – the star that will never die’

Periphrastic and *s*-passive in Danish

- Traditional analysis (e.g. Lundskær-Nielsen & Holmes 2010): *s*-passive more ‘general’ than periphrastic passive
 - *s*-passive mainly used for habitual, generic, and stative meanings → the distinction is aspectual
- ‘Mood’ analysis (e.g. Heltoft & Jacobsen 1996; Hansen & Heltoft 2011; Herslund 2002): *s*-passive more ‘objective’ than periphrastic passive
 - *s*-passive involves ‘a layer of non-speaker consciousness’ (Heltoft & Jacobsen 1996: 204) → the distinction is modal

Passive infinitive (after modal verb)

- (1) Denne postej skal **spises** inden ugens udgang
this paté shall eat.INF.PASS before week.DEF.POSS end
'This paté has to be eaten before the end of the week (according to the sell-by date).'
- (2) Denne postej skal **blive spist** inden ugens udgang
this paté shall become.INF eat.PTCP before week.DEF.POSS end
'This paté will be eaten before the end of the week (I promise).'

Source: Heltoft & Jacobsen (1996: 210)

Finite passives: present tense

- (3) Der **danses** til det nyeste musik
there dance.PASS to DEF newest music

Description of a recurring dance class: 'Dancing is [always] to the newest music' (hdfglostrup.dk)

- (4) Og så **bliver** der **danset** til god musik
and then become.PRS there dance.PTCP to good music

Description of a Christmas party: 'And then there is dancing [i.e. people dance] to some good music' (grindstedseniorbowling.dk)

Passives in written and spoken language

Table 1: Distribution of *s*- and periphrastic passive (based on Laanemets 2012: 97)

	Newspaper corpus			Conversation corpus		
	<i>s</i> -passive	Periph.	Total	<i>s</i> -passive	Periph.	Total
INF	418 (71.7%)	165 (28.3%)	583	551 (76.4%)	170 (23.6%)	721
PRS	591 (73.3%)	215 (26.7%)	806	63 (8.9%)	647 (91.1%)	710
PST	14 (3.2%)	417 (96.8%)	431	6 (0.6%)	981 (99.4%)	987

Finite passives: past tense

- (5) Skuddet {**hørtes** / blev hørt} over hele byen.
shot.DEF hear.PST.PASS become.PST hear.PTCP across whole town.DEF
'The shot was heard across the whole town.'
- (6) Brevene {***skreves** / blev skrevet} af ministeren.
letter.PL.DEF write.PST.PASS become.PST write.PTCP by minister.DEF
'The letters were written by the minister.'

(constructed examples)

Past-tense passives (I)

Table 2: Passive forms of ‘hear’ and ‘write’

	<i>høre</i> ‘hear’		<i>skrive</i> ‘write’	
	s-passive	Periph.	s-passive	Periph.
INF	<i>høres</i>	<i>blive hørt</i>	<i>skrives</i>	<i>blive skrevet</i>
PRS	<i>høres</i>	<i>bliver hørt</i>	<i>skrives</i>	<i>bliver skrevet</i>
PST	<i>hørtes</i>	<i>blev hørt</i>	<i>*skreves</i>	<i>blev skrevet</i>

Past-tense passives (II)

- s-passive generally infrequent in the past tense, but (all?) weak and a few strong verbs may still form it:
 - 269 examples of *hørtes* ‘was heard’ in *KorpusDK*
 - 44 examples of *spilledes* ‘was played’
 - 39 examples of *vandtes* ‘was won’
 - 14 examples of *toges* ‘was taken’
 - But no **skreves* ‘was written’, **drakkes* ‘was drunk’, **skødes* ‘was shot’ ...
- NB: no similar restriction on non-passive s-forms (‘middles’):
 - *skændtes* ‘argued’ (306 hits), *sloges* ‘fought’ (376), *fandtes* ‘existed’ (2,000+), *slukkedes* ‘burned out’ (48) – all fine

Strong s-passives: examples

- (7) Etapen **vandtes** af den 30-årige italiener Davide Bramati.
stage.DEF win.PST.PASS by DEF 30-y.o. Italian D. B.
'The stage was won by the 30-year-old Italian Davide Bramati'
(*KorpusDK*, newspaper)
- (8) Han **frigaves** og sendtes i eksil i San Casciano.
he release.PST.PASS and send.PST.PASS in exile in S. C.
'He [Niccolò Machiavelli] was released and sent into exile in San Casciano' (*KorpusDK*, encyclopedia)

Strong past-tense passives

Table 3: Past-tense forms of strong conjugation classes

	Infinitive	Past active	Past s-passive
I	<i>skrive</i> 'write'	<i>skrev</i>	* <i>skreves</i>
II	<i>bryde</i> 'break'	<i>brød</i>	* <i>brødes</i>
III	<i>drikke</i> 'drink'	<i>drak</i>	* <i>drakkes</i>
	<i>vinde</i> 'win'	<i>vandt</i>	vandtes
IV	<i>bære</i> 'carry'	<i>bar</i>	* <i>bares</i>
V	<i>bede</i> 'ask'	<i>bad</i>	* <i>bades</i>
	<i>se</i> 'see'	<i>så</i>	sås
	<i>give</i> 'give'	<i>gav</i>	?gaves
VI	<i>drage</i> 'draw, travel'	<i>drog</i>	droges
	<i>jage</i> 'chase'	<i>jog</i>	joges
	<i>tage</i> 'take'	<i>tog</i>	toges
	<i>lade</i> 'let'	<i>lod</i>	?lodes
	<i>fare</i> 'go, rush'	<i>for</i>	?fores
VII	<i>gå</i> 'go, walk'	<i>gik</i>	* <i>gikkes</i>

Section 2

Explaining the lexical restrictions

Why restrictions on strong past-tense passives? (I)

- Diderichsen (1962): strong PST form are monosyllabic, but *s*-passives are disyllabic – hence strong PST *s*-passives ‘feel wrong’
 - But: strong PST middle verbs (e.g. *sloges* ‘fought’, *fandtes* ‘existed’) are also disyllabic

Why restrictions on strong past-tense passives? (II)

- Heltoft (2006): only verbs which had identical PST IND and PST SBJV stems in Middle Danish (1100–1500) can form a PST *s*-passive
 - This presupposes stability between Middle Danish and the present
 - But some ‘unexpected’ forms are attested in the intervening period, e.g. *brødes* ‘was broken’ and *indbødes* ‘was invited’ in 19th-c. texts

Why restrictions on strong past-tense passives? (III)

- Lundquist (2016): PST *s*-passive licensed by partial syncretism between PST active and PTCP
 - e.g. PST *hørte* ‘heard’ + PTCP *hørt* → PST *s*-passive *hørtes* licensed
 - But: no strong verbs should then allow PST *s*-passives
 - No syncretism between PST *vandt* ‘won’ + PTCP *vundet*, but PST *s*-passive *vandtes* is found
 - Also: some forms look syncretic in writing but are distinguished by *stød*:
 - e.g. PST /'hø̥ɐ̯tə/ vs. PTCP /hø̥ʔt/

Why restrictions on strong past-tense passives? (IV)

- No one in the literature seems to have argued for a link between the restrictions and the very low frequency of PST *s*-passives
- Possible working hypotheses:
 - Low frequency of PST *s*-passive → insufficient input → some forms (**skreves*, **drakkes*, etc.) are not acquired
 - Some forms (**skreves*, **drakkes*, etc.) are ungrammatical → periphrastic passive fills this ‘gap’ → generalization of periphrastic passive in the past
- The historical development also not considered in earlier accounts

Research questions

- Have the restrictions on *s*-passives changed historically?
- Has the use of the two passive constructions changed historically, and what (if anything) might this tell us about the restrictions?

Methods

- Survey of metalinguistic evidence, i.e. earlier grammars (17th–19th c.)
 - Only descriptions by either a) native Danish speakers; or b) people living and working in Denmark
 - No sharp distinction between descriptive and prescriptive works at this point – most are in some sense prescriptive
- Historical corpus study (so far 18th–19th c.)
 - Only texts by named individuals – possible to check sociolinguistic variables
 - Selected texts which are likely to contain many past-tense forms (historical narratives, autobiographies, etc.)

Section 3

Descriptions in older grammars

Surveyed older grammars (I)

Table 4: Grammars, c. 1650–1820

Author	Title	Year	Restr.?
E. Pontoppidan	<i>Grammatica Danica</i>	1668	no
H. Gerner	<i>Orthographia Danica</i>	1679	no
J. P. Høysgaard	<i>Accentuered og Raisonnered Grammatica</i>	1747	no
J. P. Høysgaard	<i>Methodisk Forsøg til en Fuldstændig Dansk Syntax</i>	1752	yes
J. Baden	<i>Forelæsninger over det Danske Sprog</i>	1785	yes
J. Werfel	<i>Dansk Brevbog</i>	1795	no
J. C. Tode	<i>Neue dänische Grammatik für Deutsche</i>	1797	no
F. Schneider	<i>Danish grammar, adapted to the use of Englishmen</i>	1803	no
F. Høegh-Guldberg	<i>Grundlæg ved grammaticalske Forelæsninger for Ungdommen</i>	1814	yes

Surveyed older grammars (II)

Table 5: Grammars, c. 1820–1900

Author	Title	Year	Restr.?
N. L. Høyer	<i>Veiledning i dansk Sproglære</i>	1823	no
R. Rask	<i>A Grammar of the Danish Language</i>	1830	(yes)
J. Jensen	<i>Forsøg til en dansk Sproglære</i>	1833	yes
E. Bojesen	<i>Kortfattet dansk Sproglære</i> (3rd edn)	1848	yes
J. Heckscher	<i>Anleitung zur Erlernung der dänischen Sprache</i>	1862	yes
E. C. Otté	<i>A simplified grammar of the Danish language</i>	1883	no
E. Jessen	<i>Dansk Grammatik</i>	1891	yes
M. Matzen	<i>Modersmaalets Sproglære</i>	1893	yes

What do the grammars tell us?

- Restrictions first discussed 1752; frequently mentioned in 19th c.
- Certain forms are consistently judged as ungrammatical, e.g.
 - **drakkes* ‘was drunk’ (Høysgaard 1752; Bojesen 1848; Heckscher 1862; Matzen 1893)
 - **sanges* ‘was sung’ (Høysgaard 1752; Høegh-Guldberg 1814; Jessen 1891; Matzen 1893)
- Sometimes forms are sanctioned which are not in use anymore, e.g.
 - *skreves* ‘was written’ (Werfel 1795; Tode 1797; Høyer 1823; Matzen 1893)
 - *dreves* ‘was driven’ (Rask 1830; Jensen 1833)
- Some works advise readers to use the s-passive as much as possible!

Preference for s-passive

Such a simple and unparalleled most important transformation of an active into a passive through the addition of a single letter, gives the language an extraordinary brevity and strength, and **I therefore hold it against the Danes that they do not make use of this peculiar passive every day**, but usually, at least in the spoken language, and sometimes even in formal speech, make use of an auxiliary.

(Tode 1797: 132; my tr. and emph.)

Preference for s-passive

Because our language, unlike many other modern ones, can usually form a passive in the present and imperfect without an auxiliary, **we should not let this advantage and convenience pass into oblivion, by too often using the also permissible formation with the auxiliary *blive*.** We should therefore preferably say: *ledes* and *lededes*, *mættes* and *mættedes*, *frelses* and *frelsedes*, rather than: *bliver* and *blev ledet*, *bliver* and *blev mættet*, *bliver* and *blev frelset*!

(Høegh-Guldberg 1814: 224; my tr. and emph.)

Preference for s-passive

... the two expressions [*s*-passive and periphrastic passive] are usually employed without any distinction; but it should be noted that, **where the simple form is possible, it would seem that it**, as more characteristic of our language, **is to be preferred**

(Jensen 1833: 338; my tr. and emph.)

Section 4

Passives in a historical corpus

Some challenges

- No ready-made historical corpus of Danish
- Digitized texts not always well suited (e.g. modernized editions or without OCR)
- Available texts are not tagged or analyzed in any way
 - Search for all words ending in -s and all past-tense forms of the passive auxiliary *blive*
 - Manual identification of true passive constructions among these results

Texts analyzed so far

Table 6: Text corpus

Author	Title	Year	Genre	Word count
Baggesen (tr.)	<i>Niels Klim</i>	1789	Fiction (novel)	72,000
S. Pedersen	<i>En fæstebondes liv</i>	1809–11	Autobiography	49,000
Andersen	<i>Eventyr</i> , vol. 1	1835–42	Fiction (fairy tales)	73,000
Kollerød	<i>Min Historie</i>	1840	Autobiography	150,000
Kierkegaard	<i>Forførerens Dagbog</i>	1843	Fiction (diary)	52,000
H. Pedersen	“Levnetsbeskrivelse”	1849	Autobiography	4,800
Schiern	“Vestmagterne ...”	1854	Academic (history)	40,000
Van Dockum	<i>Gamle Minder</i>	1877	Autobiography	52,000



Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), writer

Source: *Store Norske Leksikon*



Ole Kollerød (1802–1840), criminal

Source: Det Kgl. Bibliotek



C. E. van Dockum (1804–1893), vice admiral

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Findings so far (I)

Table 7: Past-tense passives in the corpus

Text	s-passive	Periph.	Total
Baggesen	62 (25.4%)	182 (74.6%)	244
S. Pedersen	35 (17.2%)	169 (82.8%)	204
Andersen	14 (15.9%)	74 (84.1%)	88
Kollerød	? 4 (2.2%)	175 (97.8%)	179
Kierkegaard	7 (20.6%)	27 (79.4%)	34
H. Pedersen	0 (0%)	50 (100%)	50
Schiern	132 (66.7%)	66 (33.3%)	198
Van Dockum	96 (22.5%)	331 (77.5%)	427

Findings so far (II)

Table 8: Strong past-tense s-passives

Text	Strong s-passives
Baggesen	(-)fandtes , <i>saaes</i> , <i>-toges</i>
S. Pedersen	<i>saaes</i> , <i>-toges</i>
Andersen	brødes , <i>-droges</i> , <i>sloges</i>
Kollerød	? fandtes
Kierkegaard	<i>-lodes</i>
H. Pedersen	none
Schiern	brødes , -bødes , <i>-droges</i> , <i>(-)gaves</i> , <i>-saaes</i> , <i>-sloges</i> , <i>(-)toges</i>
Van Dockum	-bares , (-)bødes , fandtes , <i>(-)gaves</i> , <i>-lodes</i> , <i>-saaes</i> , <i>(-)toges</i>

Passive or middle: *findes* ‘be found; be, exist’

(9) jeg blev fessenteert, og den **fantes** hos mig.

I become.PST search.PTCP and it find.PST.PASS? with me

(Context: There was a knife in the prison which Kollerød kept although it did not belong to him) ... ‘I was searched and it was (found?) with me.’ (Kollerød, p. 228)

Section 5

Conclusions and open questions

Lexical restrictions in earlier Danish

- Restrictions mentioned by several grammarians c. 1750–1900
- Some strong forms consistently judged as ungrammatical
 - e.g. **drakkes* ‘was drunk’, **sanges* ‘was sung’
- Other forms documented in 18th- and 19th-c. texts which are not possible today
 - e.g. *brødes* ‘was broken’, *fandtes* ‘was found’
 - *skreves* ‘was written’ and some other forms sanctioned by grammars, but not found in my texts
- An explanation of the restrictions will have to take this diachronic instability into account

Past *s*-passive as standardization effect?

- Almost never used by Kollerød, very frequent in the academic text (Schiern)
- Close to non-existent in present-day spoken language (cf. Laanemets 2012)
- On the other hand, 19th-c. prescriptivists advise people to use the form
- If the past-tense *s*-passive as a whole is a result of literacy/standardization, then so are the lexical restrictions

Further perspectives

- Investigation of larger corpus
 - Especially more informal texts closer to the spoken language
 - ... and multiple texts by the same authors – is usage of PST s-passive better explained by text type or individual preferences?
- More systematic overview of the historically attested forms
 - When do forms like *brødes* ‘was broken’ and *fandtes* ‘was found’ disappear from the texts? When do they first appear?
- Comparison with regional dialects
 - What might these tell us about the role of standardization?

Some questions

- Are similar voice restrictions (e.g. in tense or mood) found in other languages?
- Are restrictions by conjugation class found elsewhere?
- If *s*-passive is really ‘artificial’ in the past tense: does this have parallels elsewhere?

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Mange tak! Thank you!