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### **Citation**

Hansen, R. P. (2019). Flexibility of frequent clause openers in talk-in-interaction: Det 'it, that' and så 'then' in the prefield in Danish. *Nordic Journal Of Linguistics*, 42(3), 291-327.  
doi:10.1017/S0332586519000088

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)


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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/81181>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

ARTICLE

# Flexibility of frequent clause openers in talk-in-interaction: *Det* ‘it, that’ and *så* ‘then’ in the prefield in Danish

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(Received 01 October 2018; revised 20 March 2019; accepted 20 March 2019; first published online 01 October 2019)

## Abstract

Through in-depth analysis of the use of *det* ‘it, that’ and *så* ‘then’ occupying the first clausal position (the prefield) in Danish talk-in-interaction, this paper investigates how speakers use highly flexible linguistic elements to their advantage when commencing clauses in real time. These particular words are useful when occupying the prefield, because their flexible nature means that they can be used even when speakers do not have a full format ready for the carrier clause, as long as they have some idea of the interactional purpose of the clause and its information structural prerequisites. The dominating frequency of the most frequent clause openers goes largely unmentioned in previous accounts of the prefield, and the use of *det* ‘it, that’ and *så* ‘then’ challenges the popular notion that the textually unmarked prefield is also the grammatical subject of the carrier clause.

**Keywords:** Danish; discourse and grammar; information structure; interactional linguistics; online syntax; syntax–pragmatics interface

## 1. Introduction

Linell (2005) discusses how the field of linguistics is subject to a WRITTEN LANGUAGE BIAS. This is true of all structural levels of theory and description, but is perhaps particularly the case for grammatical descriptions of languages with a long history of writing, such as Danish. In such descriptions, examples derived from introspection typically mirror the written language (ibid.:176), and attested examples typically come from written corpora.<sup>1</sup> The present study is part of a larger attempt to counteract this bias by describing the linguistic structure of Danish on the basis of how it is used in spoken discourse, or TALK-IN-INTERACTION – the DanTIN (Danish Talk-in-Interaction) project. In recent years, this project has been publishing research on the grammatical structure of Danish talk-in-interaction as part of

the online platform Samtalegrammatik.dk (Steensig et al. 2013). From an interactional or conversation analytic perspective, this means describing how linguistic resources are used for managing turn-taking and sequential organization (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 1990, 1996). From a strictly linguistic perspective, it means investigating how speakers make use of e.g. sounds and grammatical structures during talk-in-interaction.

The current study mostly falls in the latter category. This paper investigates the use of the prefield in Danish talk-in-interaction. The prefield denotes the highly flexible first position in declarative clauses as well as *wh*-initial interrogative clauses in all Germanic languages except English. This position is of particular interest to the overall framework, due to a cross-linguistic tendency to place known information clause-initially (e.g. Tomlin 1986), meaning that the clause-opener is expected to be highly context-dependent. As such, a theory assuming context freedom in syntax is unlikely to provide a fulfilling description of which concerns go into choosing a constituent to place in the prefield. More generally, different considerations must be taken into account in talk-in-interaction than in written text, due to both the inherently temporal nature of talk-in-interaction (e.g. Auer 2009, Hopper 2011) and the nature of turn organization.

In addition to providing a general overview of the prefield in talk-in-interaction, this paper focuses specifically on the functional considerations underlying the use of two items which very frequently occur in the prefield: *det* 'it, that', which acts as either a neuter third person pronoun or an expletive subject, and which takes no case marking; and *så* 'then', an adverb which has several related meanings in the temporal and modal domains, and happens to be homophonous with the semantically similar conjunction *så* 'so'. I will argue that the semantic and functional flexibility of these two words renders them highly useful for speakers when shaping their clauses in real time, and that this is at least partially the reason for their rather extreme frequency as clause openers in talk-in-interaction. Sections 2–4 below will provide first a literature review of existing descriptions of the prefield, followed by a description of the theoretical framework of this study and the methodology. Section 5 will present the results of the analysis, and Section 6 will discuss and summarize the results.

## 2. Previous descriptions of the prefield

Similar to the other Germanic languages (except English), Danish syntax is notable for having what can be referred to as XV or V2 (verb-second) word order in main clauses (Platzack 1985, Vikner 1995): all grammatical roles have canonical positions in the clause, but almost all constituents can also principally be clause-initial. If the finite verb is clause-initial, it typically indicates an imperative or interrogative illocutionary frame (although see Rathje 2013, Jensen 2015). If any other constituent is clause-initial, it typically<sup>2</sup> indicates an indicative frame (e.g. Hansen & Heltoft 2011:38). The first position in an indicative clause is the prefield, called *fundamentfelt* ('foundation field', following Diderichsen 1946; henceforth simply referred to as F) in the Danish grammatical tradition. In large part because of F, the most popular way of visualizing Danish clause structure is still the topological model popularized by Diderichsen (1946) under the name *sætningsskemaet* ('the clause schema'). Modified versions of this model with varying terminology have since also been used

**Table 1.** Diderichsen's (1962:186) main clause model.

Connector field	Foundation field	Nexus field			Content field				
CONJUNCTION	FOUNDATION	FINITE VERB	SUBJECT	NEXUS ADVERB <sub>N</sub>	AUX INF	FULL INF	OBJECT <sub>1</sub>	OBJECT <sub>2</sub>	CONTENT ADVERB <sub>N</sub>
og	så	kunne	han	sikkert	få	sagt	hende	besked	i tide
<i>and</i>	<i>then</i>	<i>could</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>probably</i>	<i>get</i>	<i>said</i>	<i>her</i>	<i>message</i>	<i>in time</i>
'and then he could probably tell her about it in time'									

for the description of Norwegian (Faarlund, Lie & Vannebo 1997:858), Swedish (Teleman, Hellberg & Andersson 1999), and German (Wöllstein-Leisten et al. 1997:55), for which a similar model was already proposed by Drach (1940). Diderichsen's (1962:186) original main clause model can be seen in Table 1.

As an integral part of Danish syntax, F is mentioned in most descriptions of Danish, although descriptions have generally gone into greater detail with its effects on the surrounding syntax, and lesser detail with its function in and of itself. Major typological overviews (e.g. Dryer 2013) tend to classify Danish as an SVO-language, presumably because there is a history of identifying the subject as the unmarked F in Danish grammatical research (e.g. Mikkelsen 1911:573ff.; Diderichsen 1962:171; Nielsen 1975; Heltoft 1986; Hansen & Heltoft 2011:74; but compare Brøndal 1928 and Hansen 1933 for opposing points of view). With regard to the communicative function of F, Diderichsen (1962:192ff.) suggests some primary considerations guiding the choice of F: previously mentioned referents are often used in F, and F can be used for emphasis (as he envisions to be the case when it is occupied by non-subjects; this was also the position taken by Togeby 1993:111ff.). Hansen (1933:74ff.), however, noted that F can only be used emphatically if it is prosodically marked as such. The general tendency to place known information early in the clause is very common cross-linguistically, and is often mentioned in the literature on information structure (e.g. Mathesius 1929, Firbas 1971, Lambrecht 1994). Tomlin (1986) refers to this tendency as the THEME FIRST PRINCIPLE. Thomsen's (1992) quantitative study of F in spoken Danish established that this principle also applies to Danish.

In Hansen & Heltoft's (2011:1729ff.) comprehensive grammar of Danish, the authors suggest three ways in which F can be filled: (i) anaphorically, referring to something previously mentioned in the text; (ii) dynamically, in which case the referent is not directly mentioned previously in the text but activated through association with previously mentioned referents; and (iii) focally, indicating what the speaker considers to be the most important part of the clause; note that this use of 'focal' differs from how the term is used in much of usage-based grammar (e.g. Lambrecht 1994 or Dik 1997), where it refers specifically to new information.<sup>3</sup> Hansen & Heltoft make a distinction between *tema* 'theme' and *emne* 'topic'; the subject is theme regardless of its position, while F is (typically) topic regardless of its grammatical role (Hansen & Heltoft 2011:1196ff., 1728ff. *inter alia*). Given its function of framing the state-of-affairs in a certain light, the subject is considered

**Table 2.** Overview of constituents found in F in previous quantitative studies.

Language	Subjects	Adverbs	Expletives
Danish	65% <sup>a</sup> ~ 70% <sup>b</sup> ~ 85% <sup>c</sup>	13% <sup>a</sup>	10% <sup>d</sup>
Swedish	64% <sup>e</sup> ~ 73% <sup>f</sup>	23% <sup>f</sup> ~ 39% <sup>g</sup>	11% <sup>f</sup> ~ 26% <sup>g</sup>
German	50% <sup>f</sup> ~ 54% <sup>h</sup>	44% <sup>f</sup>	6% <sup>f</sup>
Dutch	61% <sup>g</sup> ~ 70% <sup>i</sup>	38% <sup>g</sup>	16% <sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Jensen (2003 vol. II: 4–5): spoken, sociolinguistic interviews

<sup>b</sup> Smidt (1971), cited from Jørgensen (2013:184): written, front pages of newspapers

<sup>c</sup> Buhl (2004), cited from Jørgensen (2013:184): written, various genres

<sup>d</sup> Thomsen (1992:199): spoken, sociolinguistic interviews

<sup>e</sup> Westman (1974:155): written, various genres

<sup>f</sup> Bohnacker & Rosén (2008:517): written, various informal genres

<sup>g</sup> Bohnacker & Lindgren (2014:42): spoken, image description task

<sup>h</sup> Fabricius-Hansen & Solfeld (1994:101): written, newspaper articles

<sup>i</sup> Bouma (2008:96): spoken, various genres

to be innately topical, but in a clause without initial subject, another topical role is required in this position.

Several studies on Danish (e.g. Thomsen 1992, Brøcker et al. 2012, Jørgensen 2016) have investigated the preference for left dislocation in some forms of language use. This entails a preference<sup>4</sup> for using short, light constituents in F; if heavier constituents are needed, such as full noun phrases or subordinate clauses, they are relegated to clausal extra positions either preceding or following the clause proper.<sup>5</sup> F itself then consists of an anaphoric or cataphoric copy of the heavier constituent, typically a pronoun or a light adverb. The phenomenon is relatively frequent in Danish talk-in-interaction (Brøcker et al. 2012, Brøcker 2014) and has been found in all the Nordic languages (Johannessen 2014).

There are quantitative studies available of F in Danish and other Germanic languages. Table 2 provides an overview of the results of these. This overview aims to be exhaustive for Danish, but not necessarily for other languages. Table 2 demonstrates that even though F provides the same syntactic flexibility in these languages, it is not utilized in the same way. There are also considerable intra-language differences, which can presumably be attributed to F exhibiting different usage patterns for different genres. With regard to information structure, Bohnacker & Rosén (2008) reports that a preference for known information in F is far more pronounced in Swedish than in German, which is mirrored in the coding in that subjects are less frequent in F in German. Similarly, Bohnacker & Lindgren (2014:43) report a more pronounced preference for function word Fs in Swedish than in Dutch. Given the wide range of genres reported on here, it is unclear how comparable these studies are to each other and to talk-in-interaction, where different considerations are at play with regard to structuring cohesion.

It should be noted that F is not necessarily strictly speaking a clause opener. As can be seen in Table 1 above, it can be preceded by a conjunction (the ‘connector field’ as per Diderichsen 1946), and in talk-in-interaction, this is very often the case. However, the connector field and F have very different interactional functions and grammatical properties (Steensig 2001:207ff.), and F can reasonably be labeled the first

position of the clause proper, as is also done by Hansen & Heltoft (2011:331). The same has been noted for Swedish, where Lindström (2008:205ff.) in his description of Swedish turn construction describes how conjunctions group with certain discourse particles in providing initial contextualization for a clause, while the contribution of the clause begins with F.

### 3. Theoretical framework

This paper uses a combination of interactional and more traditional grammatical methods for data analysis. The different frameworks drawn upon are presented in this section. As mentioned above, the study theoretically aligns with the work of the research group DanTIN, which uses a combination of Conversation Analysis and traditional grammatical analytical resources such as syntagmatic and paradigmatic distribution. As with much other work on the interface between interaction and grammar, the theoretical perspective of the group is usage-based without adhering to any one particular theory. The more linguistically inclined work in Conversation Analysis is sometimes referred to using the umbrella term Interactional Linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2001, 2018; Steensig 2001; Lindström 2009). This tradition provides an important methodological and analytical toolkit for this study. As the name suggests, there is a predominant focus on interactional structure in Interactional Linguistics; this paper, however, mostly focuses on grammatical structure, and is in that sense more aligned with the related Discourse & Grammar framework (Du Bois 2003), in analyzing linguistic structure on the basis of its use in spoken discourse, and in partially doing so on the basis of a numerical account of the phenomenon in question (see also e.g. Hopper & Thompson 1980, 1984; Du Bois 1987).

Important insights from Interactional Linguistics are incorporated in the analysis, including (i) the temporal structure of utterance formation, (ii) a focus on the placement of utterances within social actions, and (iii) an insistence on using naturally occurring data as the basis for analysis (see Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018:18ff.). By the first criterion is meant that speakers do not fully plan utterances ahead of time but rather shape them as they are being uttered (syntax is online; Auer 2000, 2009); this is only rarely acknowledged in other grammatical frameworks, and although it is theoretically acknowledged in Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 2008:79ff.), it appears to have had little influence on the overall framework. By the second criterion is meant that speakers use utterances to carry out social actions in a sequentially organized manner (Sacks et al. 1974), and the particular social action or sequential position of an utterance is sometimes said to be partially or fully responsible for the syntactic coding of a given utterance, in what Schegloff (1996) refers to as ‘positionally sensitive grammars’ (see also Ford, Fox & Thompson 2003, Fox & Thompson 2010, Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen 2015). These interactional insights are highly integrated in Discourse & Grammar, but are at most vaguely acknowledged in other usage-based schools of grammar.

While the frameworks of Interactional Linguistics and Discourse & Grammar bring important analytical and methodological insights to working with talk-in-interaction, none of them have fully-fledged grammatical toolkits. Regarding the

use of nominal Fs, the primary function of the clause opener is intricately linked with information structure. For the analysis of information structure, one must look for a traditional grammatical framework to combine with the more interactional frameworks. It is a general tenet of usage-based frameworks of grammar that the context of an utterance has an observable influence on its structure (Du Bois 2003), and as such, all major usage-based frameworks have theories of how grammar is affected by information structure. These theories differ in both their implementation of information structure and their terminology; for example, the Systemic Functional Grammar notion of theme (Halliday 1967) appears very similar to the Construction Grammar notion of topic (Lambrecht 1994), while the Cognitive Grammar notion of topic (Langacker 1991:313) has altogether different connotations. Several of these treatments of information structure have useful insights.

The theory of information structure which forms the basis of that component of both Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin 1993, 2005) and several types of Construction Grammar (Michaelis & Lambrecht 1996, Goldberg 2006) comes from Lambrecht (1994). His notion of topicality is the primary one used here. In his theory, the topic of a clause is a lexicogrammatical manifestation of part of that clause's pragmatic presupposition. The presupposition refers to what the speaker believes that the hearer knows and is aware of at the time of the utterance, and the topic is a delimited part of the presupposition which forms the basis for the clause's assertion. Another component of Lambrecht's theory concerns the activation status of referents. They can be either active, inactive or semi-active (i.e. easily activated through association with other active referents). A well-formed topic is either active or semi-active, and its coding is dependent on its activation status.

The Cognitive Grammar notion of topic (Langacker 1991) can be loosely defined as what a clause is about. For example, in the discourse stretch 'I've been thinking about the wedding ... The back yard would be a good place', the wedding is considered the topic of both clauses (ibid.:313), even though it would not be considered topical in either clause by Lambrecht. While Langacker's notion of topic lacks the nuance of Lambrecht, Lambrecht's theory similarly lacks a term for the overall topic of talk; such a unit, however, has analytical merit, at least to the extent that speakers orient towards it. In the analysis below, I will refer to it as the discourse topic, and use it alongside topic (as defined by Lambrecht). Another useful notion from Cognitive Grammar that will be made reference to in the analysis is the DISCOURSE SPACE (Langacker 2001), which refers to all information available to the interlocutors at the time of an utterance, including not just the pragmatic presupposition but also the physical setting of the speakers.

In their discussions of topic management, the above-mentioned theories generally take for granted that a discourse topic refers to a specific referent. This is not something the authors discuss per se, but it is clear from their examples. By specific referents, I refer to persons, objects, concepts, etc. that are typically coded using nouns or noun phrases. This is practical, since they are easy to track in discourse; for a pronominal topic, one can easily draw a line to a focal noun phrase in the previous clause, for example. These are presented as prototypical topics, but as is shown below, this is not representative of Danish talk-in-interaction, in which the referential scope of topical *det* 'it, that' tends to be broader and more diffuse,

**Table 3.** Overview of recordings used for the study.

Name	Corpus	Duration (minutes:seconds)
anne_og_beate	Sam2	10:08
preben_og_thomas	Sam2	30:45
samfundskrise	Sam2	18:30
par_ved_spisebord	AUling	20:00
sofasladder	AUling	34:26

even if its function as expletive subject is not considered. The descriptions of topic management in the theories presented above cannot neatly cover diffuse elements, such as pronouns referring to states-of-affairs or entire discourse stretches.

#### 4. Data and methodology

The material for this study comes from two corpora: Sam2 (MacWhinney & Wagner 2010a, b) and AUling (see Samtalegrammatik.dk 2018). Sam2 (MacWhinney & Wagner 2010b) is a publicly available corpus of three audiovisual recordings of free two-person interactions between acquaintances collected for the larger Samtalebank and Talkbank repositories. No researchers are present during the recordings. AUling is a large corpus of various types of interactional data gathered by students and staff at Aarhus University; this corpus is not publicly available, but videos can be obtained after signing a non-disclosure agreement. The recordings from AUling used for this study are similar in nature to the recordings from the Sam2 corpus. The speakers analyzed for this study are from various age groups, and all speak Western varieties of Standard Danish. In total, five videos were used for the study, including all videos from the Sam2 corpus and two videos from AUling that were chosen on the basis of their overall similarity to the Sam2 videos, i.e. free two-person interactions between acquaintances not involved in other activity than spoken interaction. Table 3 shows an overview of the recordings used.

The recordings themselves are the object of analysis, but they are represented here in the form of transcriptions according to Jefferson's (2004) conventions for Conversation Analysis. Jeffersonian transcription essentially follows the conventional grapheme–phoneme correspondences of the target language, but not necessarily the spelling conventions. This allows for relative ease of transcription as compared to phonetic transcription, while also allowing the researcher to show e.g. phonetic reduction through orthographic modification.<sup>6</sup> Pauses, overlap, stress, intonation patterns, and several other types of prosodic modification are all indicated in Jeffersonian transcription. The recordings have all previously been transcribed to varying degrees of granularity, but all examples in the paper have been re-transcribed by the author. An overview of transcription conventions is given in Appendix A. All participants have been anonymized.



In order to get a general overview of the usage of F in talk-in-interaction, F of 100 consecutive clauses with main clause word order<sup>7</sup> were analyzed from each of the recordings. Each of the 500 clauses were coded for a number of parameters: the form of F, its grammatical role in the carrier clause, the activation status of its referent, the direction of phoric reference if applicable, its referential scope, and its position in the turn-at-talk.

All examples analyzed in the remainder of this paper come from this corpus of 500 clauses and have been chosen because they illuminate dominant structures or contain interesting exceptions. Examples typically include multiple clauses of interest to the topic at hand, along with their surrounding interactional context. They are presented with corpus name, file name, and line number in the original transcript, for convenient reference. All examples are accompanied by English translations, while clauses which are actively used in the analysis are also accompanied by morpheme-by-morpheme glosses (see conventions in Appendix B). Note that only the glosses themselves include indications of morpheme boundaries, in order to avoid intrusive characters in the transcribed speech. The clauses in focus are marked with arrows, and the relevant Fs are in boldface.

## 5. Results

This section presents the results of the analysis. First, the general findings are presented in the form of a numerical account of the use of F in talk-in-interaction. Following this, exemplified in-depth analyses are presented of the different usage patterns of *det* 'it, that' and *så* 'then'.

### 5.1 General overview

Table 4 shows the distribution of grammatical roles of Fs in the data. As seen in Table 4, most Fs are grammatical subjects in the main clause. Adverbials are also quite frequent, and significantly more so than in Jensen's (2003) study of F (recall Table 2 above). They are less frequent, however, than has been reported for Dutch and German (Bohnacker & Rosén 2008, Bohnacker & Lindgren 2014). Other nominal roles than subject are less frequent, although they are somewhat more frequent than in other Germanic languages, as reported by Bohnacker and colleagues. The other-category in Table 4 includes e.g. prepositional objects and arguments from subordinate clauses, of which all logical possibilities except for indirect object are found in the data, mirroring Jensen's (2003) findings.

An overview of frequent forms found in F in the data can be seen in Table 5. Note that the forms in Table 5 refer to Fs proper and may be preceded in their respective clauses by heavier constituents in extraposition. A striking thing about the above numbers is the extreme frequency of the most frequent Fs, with the three most frequent ones appearing in more than half of the analyzed clauses. Steensig (1994:76, 2001:231) mentions the frequency of *det* 'it, that' and *så* 'then' in this position in talk-in-interaction, and in the sociolinguistic interviews analyzed by Jensen (2003), *det* 'it, that' is actually found to occupy the prefield even more frequently than here. Otherwise this frequency goes unmentioned in the traditional grammatical literature. With the exception of *så* 'then' and *nu* 'now', both of which are light

**Table 4.** Grammatical roles in the prefield.

Grammatical role	Number	Percentage
Subject of main clause	310	62%
Adverbial	122	24.4%
Direct object of main clause	47	9.4%
Other nominal roles	21	4.2%
Total	500	100%

**Table 5.** Most frequent forms in the prefield.

Form	Number	Percentage
<i>det</i> 'it' 3SG.NEU, <i>that</i> '	139	27.8%
<i>of which</i> expletive subjects <i>account for</i>	26	5.2%
<i>så</i> 'then'	93	18.6%
<i>jeg</i> 'I' 1SG.NOM	76	15.2%
<i>der</i> 'there'	34	6.8%
<i>den</i> 'it' 3SG.UTER	21	4.2%
<i>han</i> 'he' 3SG.MASC.NOM	21	4.2%
<i>vi</i> 'we' 1PL.NOM	20	4%
<i>de</i> 'they' 3PL.NOM	18	3.6%
<i>hva</i> 'what'	12	2.4%
<i>du</i> 'you' 2SG.NOM	9	1.8%
<i>nu</i> 'now'	9	1.8%
<i>hun</i> 'she' 3SG.FEM.NOM	7	1.4%
other forms	41	8.2%
Total	500	100%

adverbs, all other frequent forms are pronominal. This preference for pronouns was also reported by Thomsen (1992) and Jensen (2003), and for Swedish by Bohnacker & Lindgren (2014). This study, however, finds significantly fewer expletive subjects in F than Thomsen (1992) did, and much fewer than has been reported for Swedish (recall Table 2 above). This may be due to the nature of the data. The relatively frequent forms shown in Table 4 above make up more than 90% of all Fs in the data, clearly indicating a preference for Fs containing brief references to active referents. Of the 41 Fs in the other-category, most are other pronouns and light adverbs. Only eight Fs contain lexical noun phrases or proper nouns, while three contain

heavy adverbial phrases and three contain direct quotes. Semantically heavier Fs in talk-in-interaction are thus possible, but fairly rare; see Puggaard (2019) for more detail on these.

Most pronominal Fs have a pronounced tendency to be grammatical subjects, but this is not the case for the most frequent form, *det* ‘it, that’. Many pronominal Fs refer to nominal-type elements such as persons, objects, concepts, etc.; this type of reference is henceforth referred to as narrow referential scope. In contrast, *det* most often refers to larger structures, i.e. the state-of-affairs of a preceding clause, or even larger discourse structures; this will henceforth be called broad referential scope.

## 5.2 Flexibility of *det* ‘it, that’

*Det* ‘it, that’ is by far the most frequent F in Danish talk-in-interaction, and (perhaps for this reason) is also highly semantically and pragmatically flexible. Part of this flexibility can be attributed to *det*’s dual function of pronoun and expletive subject. This is an important distinction, syntactically and pragmatically, but since they are homophonous, this distinction is not available to hearers on occurrence; as discussed below, this formal identity may also be part of the appeal for speakers in using it as clause opener. When not acting as expletive subject, *det* is grammatically a neuter gender third person singular pronoun, but whether or not its gender has any significance depends on the context. Similar to the corresponding uter gender (also known as common gender) pronoun *den*, but unlike other Danish personal pronouns, *det* does not take case inflection, and thus does not require any modification in order to appear in F occupying diverse grammatical roles in the carrier clause. This section explores the multiple functions of *det* in F (F-*det*), in turn covering the flexible referential scope of pronominal F-*det*, cases in which the function of F-*det* is not clear from the context, and finally expletive use.

### 5.2.1 Flexible referential scope

F-*det* can have both relatively narrow and very broad referential scope. In this paper, F-*det* with clear reference (see Section 5.2.2) is characterized either as having narrow, state-of-affairs or discourse reference, or as having an expletive function; these are all exemplified below. Their distribution is seen in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Distribution of referential scope in F-*det*.

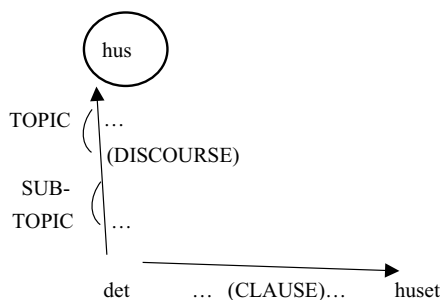
Referential scope	Number	Percentage
Narrow	17	12.2%
State-of-affairs	63	45.3%
Discourse	30	21.6%
Expletive	26	18.7%
Unclear	3	2.2%
Total	139	100%

In (1) below, *F-det* is used with both broad and narrow use, the former having state-of-affairs scope. Grammatically, *det* with narrow scope clearly differs from *det* with broad scope, in that it exhibits neuter gender agreement with a noun phrase, while grammatical gender is not relevant to *det* with broad scope (Kappelgaard & Hjorth 2017:23).

(1) Sam2 | preben\_og\_thomas | l.299

- 01 PRE: så de nødt til å ha nogen værelser  
 so 3PL.NOM need\_to to INF have some room-PL  
 ‘so they need to have some rooms’
- 02 → å **de:t** de nødt til  
 and that\be.PRS 3PL.NOM need\_to to  
 ‘and they need to’
- 03 å lave nede i kælderen,  
 INF make-INF down in basement-DEF.UTER  
 ‘make them down in the basement,’
- 04 fordi: at de:r- der er kun tre værelser ovenpå,  
 ‘because there are- there are only three rooms upstairs,’
- 05 → **de:t** kun (.) femoghalvtres kvadratmeter  
 3SG.NEU\be.PRS only five-and-fifty square-meter  
 ‘it’s only fiftyfive square meters’
- 06 i grund (.) rids huset.  
 in ground plan house-DEF.NEU  
 ‘in ground (.) plan the house.’

In (1), the interlocutors are discussing the house that Preben’s daughter and son-in-law have recently bought, and how they will need to build rooms in the basement to increase the living area of the property. *F-det* is used twice in (1) with varying referential scope. In line 5, *F-det* is used with reference to *huset* ‘the house’. It is the grammatical subject, which is almost always the case when *F-det* has narrow referential scope. *Huset* ‘the house’ is the discourse topic, but it has not been mentioned either explicitly or with an anaphor for a while, with the interaction instead revolving around sub-topics such as the basement, the rooms, etc. *Huset* ‘the house’ is thus in itself only semi-active as this point, and Preben appears to think that the anaphor may be an insufficient reference, as he refreshes it with a full mention of *huset* ‘the house’ in extraposition following the clause proper in line 6. The reference of *F-det* in line 5 is thus simultaneously anaphoric and cataphoric, referring to both the semi-active discourse topic and the explicit extraposition. Such an anaphoric-cataphoric split reference can be illustrated as in Figure 1, which shows how the intended reference of *F-det* in line 5 is *huset* ‘the house’, the last explicit mention of which is approximately 30 seconds earlier in the interaction. As a range of related referents have become topics, *huset* ‘the house’ is at this point dynamically active. Analyzing *F-det* in Figure 1 as a cataphor is admittedly a post hoc measure; it was probably not conceived as such, but that is how it is eventually presented to the



**Figure 1.** Illustration of narrow anaphoric-cataphoric split reference.

hearer. It was presumably conceived as an anaphor only, with the extraposition added as a repair strategy. A plausible explanation for this is that for *det* to be parsed as a neuter gender reference, an available neuter gender referent needs to be highly active.

The reference of the other example of F-*det* in (1) cannot be equally clearly delimited. In line 2, F-*det* is the object of a subordinate clause (line 3). This F-*det* is semantically incompatible with *huset* ‘the house’, and grammatically incompatible with *værelser* ‘rooms’ of line 1 (as that would have required an oblique case third person plural pronoun *dem* ‘them’). Rather, F-*det* refers to the state-of-affairs of the previous clause (line 1), i.e. the conceptual content of the predicate *nødt til å ha nogen værelser* ‘need to have some rooms’. The given topic of the clause in line 2 does not refer to a nominal-type entity, but rather the assertion of the preceding clause. This use of broad reference topics is mentioned surprisingly little in the grammatical literature (although see Houser, Mikkelsen & Toosarvandani 2007), although it does surface in text linguistic literature on cohesion (e.g. Ulbæk 2005:44). From an interactional, pragmatic point of view, they are to be expected: clauses build upon each other and will be naturally prone to include relevant portions of the discourse space or pragmatic presupposition with a reference that is as light as possible.

The excerpt in (2) contains two further instances of F-*det* referring to states-of-affairs:

(2) Samtalebank | samfundskrise | 1.278

01 AST: altså hvis det er aktier å det [ er- ] du [ ved- ] det halvt-  
‘you know if it’s stocks and it’s- you know- it’s fifth-’

02 LIS: [ ja, ] [ ja, ]  
‘yeah, yeah,’

03 AST: de er faldet til det halve,  
3PL.NOM be.PRS fall-PST\_PTCP to DEF.NEU half-DEF  
‘they have dropped to half,’

04 → ·hhh det er aktierne jo. (.) faktisk.  
that be.PRS stock.PL-DEF PRT actually  
‘the stocks actually did that.’

05 LIS: nåja så ka man jo miste det halve der ja  
‘oh yeah then you can lose half there yeah’



- 06            verdens første computer,  
              'the world's first computer,'
- 07            (0.7)
- 08    EVA:    under    [ anden verdenskrig,  
              'during world war two,'
- 09    ADAM:            [ sån simpel computer  
                              'like simple computer'
- 10            ja (.) der omkring,  
              'yeah (.) around then,'
- 11            ·hhh asså sån-  
              'you know like-'
- 12            i- ikke en decideret computer den ka kun en ting  
              'n- not an actual computer it can only do one thing'
- 13            me- men en- en maskine,  
              'bu- but a- a machine,'
- 14            ·hhh som: (.) som regner det ud for dem.  
              'whi:ch (.) which figures it out for them.'
- 15    EVA:    m:,
- 16            (2.4)
- 17            → jamen **det** lyder        da meget spændende.  
                  PRT        that    sound-PRS    PRT    very    exciting  
                  'well that sounds pretty exciting.'

In (3), Adam is summarizing the plot of the film *The Imitation Game* to Eva, in which the protagonist builds the world's first computer in order to decode messages that the Allies intercepted from Germans during the Second World War. This film has been the discourse topic for a while at this point in the interaction, with various sub-topics being introduced and discussed along the way. Prior to the sequence in (3), Adam has explained the notion of decoding messages, when Eva asks in line 2 what decoding has to do with the world's first computer. Adam responds in lines 5–14 by explaining what is meant by computer in this context. In lines 15–17, Eva wraps up the discourse topic with a particle indicating her understanding *m:*, followed by an assessment of the plot. *F-det* in line 17 does not refer to any specific predicate-type or nominal-type referent. It clearly does not refer to the discourse topic *filmen* 'the film', as that would require utterer gender agreement. Rather, it refers to the entire preceding stretch of discourse, scoping over several turns-at-talk, presumably including not just the sequence included in (3), but what precedes it as well. The discourse reference of this *F-det* is illustrated in Figure 3.

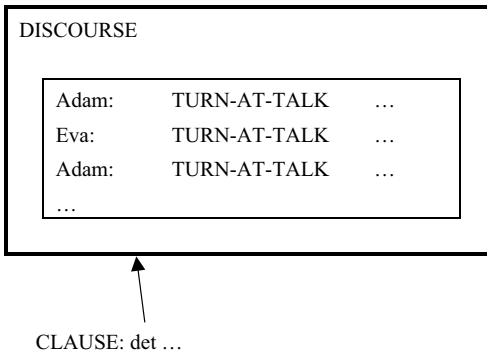


Figure 3. Illustration of discourse reference.

F-*det* with discourse reference tends to be the grammatical subject of the carrier clause. This pattern is functionally motivated: when F-*det* has discourse reference, the clause typically provides an assessment of the discourse topic of the preceding stretch of interaction. These tend to be predicative clauses, often with the format F-*det* + COPULA VERB + ASSESSMENT (Garly 2018:37). Assessments are a typical resource for closing storytelling sequences (Goodwin & Goodwin 1987, Garly 2018:17).

Thus, F-*det* with either narrow or discourse reference tends to act as the grammatical subject of its carrier clause, but this is not the case when F-*det* refers to states-of-affairs. In fact, when a clause contains *det* referring to states-of-affairs, it generally occupies F of said clause, no matter what its grammatical role is. In these cases, the information structural function of the word overshadows the grammatical role in the clause. This is demonstrated in (4):

(4) AULing | par\_ved\_spisebord | 1.250

- 01 EVA: det godt nok nogen små hår,  
'it's really some small hairs,'
- 02 (1.4)
- 03 øhm:  
'uhm:'
- 04 ADAM: det ka være de:t din trøje,  
it can.PRS be-INF it\be.PRS 2SG.GEN.UTER shirt  
'it might be it's your shirt,'
- 05 EVA: → ↑ nå:: ja det kan det °da nemt være°.  
PRT yeah that can.PRS that PRT easy-ADVZ be.INF  
'↑oh:: yeah that could °easily be°.'

In (4), Eva and Adam talk about some small hairs that Eva has found in her food. Adam suggests that the hairs might come from Eva's shirt, and she responds in line 5 by saying that she had not thought of this but that it might very well be the case. F-*det* in line 4 is the grammatical subject of the clause. It refers cataphorically to the



assertion in the subordinate clause *det din trøje* ‘it’s your shirt’. Line 5 begins with the realization token *nåja* (Emmertsen & Heinemann 2010), which is lengthened. There are two instances of *det* in line 5; an expletive subject and a broad anaphoric reference to the preceding state-of-affairs. The latter is not prosodically emphasized, and information structurally it is the clause’s topic. The grammatical literature would suggest that the expletive subject is the textually unmarked F here (e.g. Heltoft 1986), but in this case topical *det* is in F. This indicates that – at least in the case of *det* – information structure is weighted higher than grammatical role when it comes to choosing a clause opener. Theories on information structure have long assumed that a clause tends to take the preceding clause’s message (rheme, assertion, focus, etc.) as its starting point, and clauses containing F-*det* with broad referential scope are a dedicated construction for doing just that.

### 5.2.2 Unclear reference and grammatical role

In the examples analyzed above, the references and grammatical roles of F-*det* are relatively clear. However, there are also examples of F-*det* having unclear reference, typically because the original clause format is abandoned before the clause is finished. In some cases, this obscures whether F-*det* was pronominal or expletive, which grammatical role was intended, etc. These examples can illuminate some features of the use of F-*det*. (5) illustrates a clause format being abandoned, leaving F-*det* with unclear reference. In (5), there is an instance of F-*det* which may be either pronominal or expletive:

(5) Samtalebank | samfundskrise | 1.411

- 01 AST:      men der var      [ så ] det i      [ det a vi ku trække det fra,      ]  
                  ‘but there was      then                              the thing that we could deduct it,’
- 02 LIS:                              [men-]                              [>der var vel os det med< olien, ]  
    ‘but-                              >there was also the< oil thing right,’
- 03                              ja du ku trække det fra i skat ja.=  
    ‘yeah it was tax deductible yeah.=’
- 04 AST: → =så **det** var      fas      kun- (0.4)  
    so it be.PST actually just  
    ‘=so it was actually just-’
- 05                              hvis du                              betalte      tyve      så      betalte      du      ti.  
    if      2SG.NOM pay-PST twenty then pay-PST 2SG.NOM ten  
    ‘if you paid twenty then you paid ten.’

In (5), Asta and Lis are comparing the financial crisis of the late ‘00s with the oil crisis in the 1970s. The two are talking about how high interests during the oil crisis were tax deductible, so that if your interest was at 20%, you only had to pay around 10%. Asta makes this point in lines 4–5. The clause in line 4 has F-*det*. It is the grammatical subject of the clause, as observable from the fact that no other nominal constituent follows the verb. This format is abandoned before the clause is finished, and after a brief pause, the clause is reformulated as conditional. Since the clause in

line 4 is never finished, the function of *F-det* is never clarified; since we are privy to the intended message as it appears in line 5, we might assume that it would have been an expletive subject. But it could also have been an anaphor with broad referential scope or a cataphor to be expanded upon in extraposition, as shown in the constructed examples in (6a, b):

(6) a. *F-det as anaphor with broad referential scope*

så det var faktisk kun lidt dyrere end normalt  
 so it be.PST actually just a.little expensive.COMP than normal.ADVZ  
 'so it(=broad reference) was actually just a little more expensive than usually'

b. *F-det as narrow-reference cataphor with expansion in extraposition*

så det<sub>neu</sub> var faktisk kun ti procent (det ekstra beløb)<sub>neu</sub>  
 so 3SG.NEU be.PST actually just ten percent DEF.NEU extra amount  
 'so it<sub>i</sub> was actually just ten percent, (the extra amount)<sub>i</sub>'

*F-det*'s flexibility in referential scope is an advantage to language users. As evidenced by lines 4–5 in (5), language users often do not have a finished format for a clause by the time they start uttering it; rather, clauses take shape as they are being uttered (Auer 2009), and sometimes the originally chosen format for a clause only reveals itself to be impractical when the clause is being spoken. Given this insight, it is very practical for language users to have a standardized clause format that is also highly flexible, which is the case for clauses with initial *F-det*.

An example of a clause with *F-det* in which the grammatical role is unclear can be seen in (7):

(7) AULing | par\_ved\_spisebord | 1.283

01 ADAM: du sagde i går du ik gad se den,  
 2SG.NOM say.PST in yesterday 2SG.NOM NEG want\_to.PST see 3SG.UTER  
 'you said yesterday you didn't wanna see it,'

02 EVA: → ja (.) men det [ har jeg fundet ud af-  
 yeah but that have.PRS 1SG.NOM find-PST\_PTCP out of  
 'yeah (.) but I found out-'

03 ADAM: [ den gider jeg godt nok ik å se.  
 'that one I really don't wanna see.'

04 EVA: a he he [ jeg har fundet ud af at=  
 1SG.NOM have.PRS find-PST\_PTCP out of SUB  
 'a he he I found out that'

05 ADAM: [ (sagde du)  
 '(you said)'

06 EVA: → =det vil jeg gerne alligevel,  
 that want.PRS 1SG.NOM like\_to actually  
 'actually I do want to,'

The interaction in (7) takes place just before that in (3); Eva has just said that she wants to see the film *The Imitation Game*, and Adam brings up that she mentioned the day before that she did not want to see it. In line 2, Eva begins uttering a clause in which she intends to say that she changed her mind (as evidenced by line 6), but this format is abandoned, presumably due to extensive overlap from Adam in which he reenacts her saying previously that she does not want to see the film. In lines 4–6, Eva delivers the message with a new format: in line 4, *jeg* 'I' is F in the superordinate clause, while in line 6, the subordinate clause uses a format with F-*det*. While the subordinate clause has main clause constituent order (as is frequently the case in talk-in-interaction; see note 7), Eva's turn in lines 4–6 clearly constitutes a single prosodic unit.

The clause in line 2 has F-*det*, with reference to the state-of-affairs in the previous clause in line 1. Since the format in line 2 is abandoned before the clause is finished, the grammatical role of F-*det* is unclear. *Jeg* 'I' is the grammatical subject, and *det* is rather a constituent in a subordinate clause which is ultimately never realized (this is known as a *knude* construction or sentence intertwining; e.g. Jakobsen 1995, Jensen 2002). Depending on how the clause would have been formed, it could have been subject, object, or prepositional object of that subordinate clause, as shown in the constructed examples in (8a–c). In these examples, the canonical position of the prefield constituent is indicated with 0, following Jakobsen (1995).

(8) a. *F-det as subordinate subject*

det	har	jeg	fundet	ud	af	0	ville	være
that	have.PRS	1SG.NOM	find-PST_PTCP	out	of	0	will.PST	be.INF
fedt	alligevel							
cool	actually							

'I found out that(F) would actually be cool'

b. *F-det as subordinate object*

det	har	jeg	fundet	ud	af	at	jeg	gerne
that	have.PRS	1SG.NOM	find-PST_PTCP	out	of	SUB	1SG.NOM	like_to
vil	0	alligevel						
want.PRS	0	actually						

'I found out I actually want to do that(F)'

c. *F-det as subordinate prepositional object*

det	har	jeg	fundet	ud	af	at		
that	have.PRS	1SG.NOM	find-PST_PTCP	out	of	SUB		
jeg	gerne	vil	være	med	til	0	alligevel	
1SG.NOM	like_to	want.PRS	be.INF	with	to	0	actually	

'I found out I actually would like to participate in that(F)'

While the clause in line 2 in (7) was in all probability not abandoned due to the format, but rather due to Adam's overlapping parody, it remains the case that a standardized clause format with a semantically and syntactically flexible first position is very advantageous to language users when interacting in real time.

As mentioned above, *det* does not take case inflection, as opposed to most other personal pronouns in Danish. This serves to make F-*det* more functionally flexible, and may serve to explain why the F-*det* construction is so frequent. Speakers of Danish appear to find the construction highly intuitive, and they are not

discouraged when *F-det* fulfills a grammatical role which has a canonical position much further into the clause. This may precisely be because the grammatical role of *F-det* does not need to be specified before beginning the clause. *F-det* can be considered a place-holder of sorts for clauses which are to some extent based on part of the active discourse space, which is the case for most clauses in talk-in-interaction; note that this is a different place-holder function from the purely syntactic one attributed to expletive subjects (e.g. Hammarberg & Viberg 1977). From the vantage point of information packaging, the reference of *F-det* is generally initially vague, and only becomes clear in the context of its carrier sentence.

There are advantages to using *F-det* for both the speaker and the hearer. If *F-det* refers to a specific nominal-type referent, it will normally quickly be identifiable as such on the basis of gender agreement, particularly since utter gendered nouns are more frequent than neuter gendered ones (approx. 75% of nouns are utter gendered; Hansen 1967:29). *F-det* with broad referential scope is thus quickly identifiable as such, and a light anaphor for this purpose is necessary to solve what Levinson (1995:95) calls the 'bottleneck in human communication': the conceptual structure of a message is generally much more complex than what can be extrapolated from the linguistic substance itself, which is why languages need generalized patterns dedicated to e.g. indicating a relationship between a clause and the preceding clause. The *F-det* format is an example of such a pattern, which is explainable in part by Levinson's (1995, 2000) I-heuristic: 'minimal forms warrant maximal interpretations' (1995:97). In other words, for the hearer, *F-det* can easily be parsed as having broad reference, precisely due to its flexibility in referential scope.

### 5.2.3 Expletive function and cataphoric reference

Expletive subjects are frequently found in *F*. While such expletive subjects are always grammatical subjects, it is not similarly the case that expletive subjects are always *F*s, as illustrated in e.g. (4) above (see also Bohnacker & Lindgren 2014). Their function is to satisfy the syntactic requirement for a subject in clauses which do not have an obvious semantic subject. *Det* is traditionally thought of as the only expletive subject, although Hansen & Heltoft (2011:1212) note that *der* 'there' is also leaning towards a purely expletive function. The majority of clauses with expletive subjects either have an overt copula verb or direct juxtaposition of subject and subject predicate due to copula deletion.<sup>8</sup> As such, the referential content of expletive *det* can often be equated to its predicate. An example can be seen in (9):

(9) Samtalebank | preben\_og\_thomas | 1.365

01 THO: når nu de har- > så ka de å få lidt mere for det  
'now that they've- > then they can also get a bit more for it'

02 hvis de endelig vil have det < solgt jo.  
'if ever they wanna < sell it.'

03 PRE: ((coughs))

04 lige præcis jo.  
'yeah exactly.'



**Table 7.** Distribution of functions of *så* ‘then’.

Function	Number	Percentage
Temporal specification	33	35.5%
Conditional specification	36	38.7%
Topic continuation	24	25.8%
Total	93	100.0%

that Danish talk-in-interaction does not simply have a preferred ordering of elements on the basis of their contribution to the information structure of the clause, but rather a preference against clause-initial focal elements, even when there are no topical elements.

**5.3 Flexibility of *så* ‘then’**

As with *det*, the second most frequent F *så* ‘then’ also has several different functions as a clause opener; they are classified here as *temporal specification*, *conditional specification*, and *topic continuation*. They will be introduced and discussed in turn below. They are fairly evenly distributed, as seen in Table 7.

**5.3.1 Temporal specification**

The most common function of F-*så* is to indicate that the conceptual content of the current clause follows or follows from what has been said in the immediately preceding discourse. It may temporally follow, in that the state-of-affairs being described occur after previously described states-of-affairs. It may follow from, in that it is true or contextually relevant as a result of something previously said (on the relationship between truth and contextual relevance, see Sweetser 1990:113ff.). This section covers temporal specification, while the next will cover conditional specification. There is quite a bit of overlap between the two; for example, a state-of-affairs may be relevant in the context of another precisely because it temporally follows it. The ambivalence of F-*så* suggests that the two are also conceptually closely related.

Temporal F-*så* is associated with storytelling sequences, as illustrated in (10):

(10) Samtalebank | anne\_og\_beate | 1.190

- 01
BEA:
→
nå:
oka:y
men
alså
så
ringer
du

PRT
okay
but
PRT
then
call-PRS
2SG.NOM

‘oh oka:y but well then you call’
- 02

å
jeg
>sagde
til
dig
rigtig
mange
gange
at
du
sku<
komme,

‘and I >told you a bunch of times that you should< come,’
- 03
(0.4)

- 04 på Lux, (.) å det ville du ik,  
'to Lux, (.) and you wouldn't,'
- 05 (0.9)
- 06 å (.) [ jam. ]  
'and (.) well.'(.)
- 07 ANN: → [ så ] faldt jeg i søvn.  
*then fall-PST 1SG.NOM in sleep*  
'then I fell asleep.'
- 08 (0.6)
- 09 BEA: ↑ gjorde du,  
'↑ you did,'
- 10 >nå okay for jeg troede nemlig<  
'>oh okay because I actually thought< '
- 11 jeg tænkte at je:g (.) øh var hel vild led nu  
'I thought that I: (.) was being totally mean now'
- 12 → fordi at så glemte jeg h: [ ↑ha ·h: ]  
*because SUB then forget-PST 1SG.NOM*  
'because then I forgot ↑ha ·h:.'
- 13 ANN: [ hh ]
- 14 BEA: → så glemte jeg at du  
*then forget-PST 1SG.NOM SUB 2SG.NOM*  
'then I forgot that you'd'
- 15 havde haft ringet  
*have-PST have-PST\_PTCP call-PST\_PTCP*  
'called'
- 15 >fordi at jeg var såhhn ved at være rimelig vissen<,  
'>because I was lihhke pretty shitfaced about then<,'
- 16 → ·hh så:: øh->å så t-kiggede jeg  
*then uh and then look-PST 1SG.NOM*  
'so::uh- >and then I looked'
- 17 → på min telefon senere å så havde du  
*on 1SG.GEN.UTER phone later and then have-PST2 SG.NOM*  
'at my phone later and then you'd'
- 18 skrevet en besked< me:d kom ned til Magasin.  
*write-PST\_PTCP INDEF.UTER message with come down to PN*  
'written a message< with come down to Magasin.'

In (10), Anne and Beate are negotiating a common understanding of what happened the previous Saturday night, when the two were supposed to meet up but failed to do so due to a series of misunderstandings. The sequence seen in (10) mostly consists of Beate presenting the events of that night chronologically, frequently using *F-så* to indicate temporal progression. The clauses with *F-så* (lines 1, 7, 12, 14, 17, 18) constitute new events in the story, while the other clauses consist of disruptions in the temporal progression of the story. In line 1, Beate references a phone call she made to Anne; the phone call is a progression in the ongoing story, and thus has *F-så*. Lines 2–6 relay the contents of the phone call, and do not in themselves include temporal progressions in the story; none of these clauses have *F-så*. The only full clause by Anne (line 7) also has *F-så*, as it is a contribution to Beate's story which modifies Beate's understanding of the events. Beate indicates in lines 9–11 that her understanding has changed, before progressing with the story in line 12. Accordingly, the clause in line 12 has *F-så*, but the ones in lines 9–11 do not. Lines 14–15 are also a progression of the story with *F-så*. Line 15 is not a progression of the story, but an explanation for the message in line 14, and thus does not have *F-så*. Lines 16–18 are all progressions in the story, and all have *F-så*. It may not always be the case that progressions in storytelling have *F-så*, but there is a strong tendency. Since turns-at-talk in storytelling sequences generally consist of many clauses, temporal *F-så* tends to occur turn-internally.

### 5.3.2 Conditional specification

In addition to temporal specification, *F-så* is often used for specifying a conditional relationship with the preceding discourse. This usage is more likely than temporal *F-så* to occur turn-initially, as it is not associated with storytelling sequences. The function of conditional *F-så* may be formalized as in (11):

- (11) *Given p, then q* (is now relevant),  
 wherein *p* = an active and immediately accessible part of the preceding discourse,  
 and *q* = the assertion of the carrier clause.

This use of *F-så* is probably formed on the basis of analogy with conditional clauses with the *hvis p så q* 'if *p* then *q*' format. In such conditionals, the protasis is syntactically in the extraposition, while the apodosis has *F-så* (e.g. Diderichsen 1962:204), which follows Haiman's (1978) claim that conditionals typologically behave like topics. Clauses with conditional *F-så* are pragmatically analogous to conditional clauses (as characterized by Comrie 1986), but instead of the protasis being found in extraposition, it is found in a different clause or across several clauses, possibly in the speech of another speaker.

Several instances of turn-initial conditional *F-så* can be seen in (12):

- (12) Samtalebank | samfundskrise | 1.278

01     AST:     de er faldet til det halve,  
                  'they have dropped to half,'



- 02            ·hhh det er akterne jo. (.) faktisk.  
             ‘the stocks did that (.) actually.’
- 03     LIS: → nåja så ka man jo miste det halve der  
             PRT then can.PRS one PRT lose.INF DEF.NEU half-DEF there  
             ‘oh yeah then you can lose half there’
- 04            [ ja det er rigtig nok. ]  
             ‘yeah that’s right.’
- 05     AST: → [ så har der ik- så har ]  
             then have.PRS there NEG then have.PRS  
             ‘then there hasn’t- then’
- 06            du jo [ kun >hundredoghalv<treds tilbage.  
             2SG.NOM PRT only hundred-and-fifty left  
             ‘you only have a >hundred and fifty< left.’
- 07     LIS: → [ ·hhhh jamen så har hun jo  
                                 yes-but then have.PRS 3SG.FEM.NOM PRT  
                                 ‘well then she’s’
- 08            været heldig ka man sige.  
             be-PST\_PTCP luck-ADJZ can.PRS one say\INF  
             ‘been lucky you might say.’
- 09     AST:    ↑jaja.  
             ‘↑yeah yeah.’

In (12), Asta and Lis are discussing the state of the stock market. In the preceding discourse, Lis has mentioned a friend who lost 50,000 DKK of a 300,000 DKK savings account due to the stock market crash. Asta is making the point that many people had it much worse, and that many people's stocks dropped to half. In line 7, Lis concludes that her friend was actually comparatively lucky. In this brief example, *F-så* is used four times. In line 3, Lis starts her turn with the realization token *nåja*, used to indicate that a problem in her epistemic access has been solved (Emmertsen & Heinemann 2010). The rest of the clause is an upshot formulation (Heritage & Watson 1979), also used to indicate that Lis' understanding is now up to date. In line 5, Asta begins another clause with *F-så* and the expletive subject *der* 'there'; she abandons this format in favor of another, which also has *F-så*, but with generalized *du* 'you' as its grammatical subject. If analyzed as conditional, the protasis to this clause consists of the assertion in lines 1–2, as illustrated in (13):

- (13)  $p$  = the stocks have dropped to half  
 $q$  = a stock-based savings account of 300,000 DKK might drop to 150,000 DKK

The clause in line 7 also has F-så. It is not clear if this clause constitutes a separate turn from the one in lines 3–4, as Lis has been speaking in overlap with Asta almost throughout Asta's turn in lines 5–6. The scope of the protasis in this clause is not

clearly delimited but refers to at least the assertion in lines 1–2 and presumably also her own realization in lines 3–4.

In (14), several examples are shown of turn-internal F-*så*. When F-*så* appears turn-internally, it is difficult to distinguish between temporal and conditional readings:

(14) Samtalebank | anne\_og\_beate | 1.243

- 01 ANN: → men *så* var- alle *lavede* et eller andet  
*but then be.PST all-PL do-PST one.NEU or other.NEU*  
 ‘but then- everybody was doing something’
- 02 → # *så* var jeg bare sådan#, (0.7) pfh (0.3) # nå#. *PRT*  
*then be.PST 1SG.NOM just like\_this*  
 ‘#then I was just like#, (0.7) pfh (0.3) #oh well#.’
- 03 (0.3)
- 04 → *så* gi [der jeg ik  
*then want.PRS 1SG.NOM NEG*  
 ‘then I don’t want to’
- 05 BEA: [ whatever hu hu *hu*  
 ‘whatever hu hu hu’
- 06 ANN: jeg *kender* jo heller ik de der ka#rate (.) *guys*#  
 ‘I don’t know those #karate (.) guys# anyways’
- 06 (.)
- 07 ANN: # så:# (0.3) jeg *tænkte* de:t *fint*  
*so 1SG.NOM think-PST that\be.PRS fine-DEF*  
 ‘#so:# (0.3) I figured it’s fine’
- 08 → *så* lægger jeg mig til å ↑ *sove*,  
*then lie.PRS 1SG.NOM 1SG.OBL to INF sleep-INF*  
 ‘then I’ll go to ↑sleep,’
- 09 så det ↑ *gjorde* jeg,  
*so that do.PST 1SG.NOM*  
 ‘so I ↑did,’

In (14), as in previous examples, Anne and Beate are discussing the events of the previous Saturday night. Anne says that she called various friends of hers, but that all of them were busy with something. She also did not know the *karate guys* (line 6) that Beate was with at the time, so she decided to go to sleep. In line 1, Anne initiates a clause with F-*så*, but abandons the format after the finite verb. She initiates another clause with F-*så* in line 2, which may be identical to the clause that she originally intended in line 1. The clause in line 2 is a quotative construction which is common among younger speakers of Danish (Rathje 2011). The quote in such a

construction does not need to be represented speech but can also be represented thought (Rathje 2009), as is the case here. F-*så* in line 2 can be analyzed as indicating either temporal or conditional specification. (14) is part of a longer storytelling sequence, so F-*så* in line 2 may indicate that the clause temporally follows the previously covered events, as discussed above, or may indicate that the represented thought follows as a result of the preceding discourse, i.e. that all of the friends that Anne called already had other plans. The two meanings are interrelated to the point of being interchangeable.

F-*så* in line 4 is more easily recognizable as having conditional meaning, since it does not describe an event per se, and has no temporal position in the storytelling sequence. It constitutes represented thought, but can easily be analyzed as a consequence of the clause in line 1, as illustrated in (15):

- (15) *p* = everyone is busy with something  
       *q* = I don't want to go out

The clause in line 8 also has F-*så*. Here, the temporal and conditional meanings are also hard to tease apart. The clause is part of a storytelling sequence and can reasonably be analyzed as temporally following the preceding parts of the sequence: the decision to go to sleep temporally follows the decision not to go out. It can also be analyzed as conditionally following the preceding, as the decision to go to sleep may follow as a result of deciding not to go out. As with F-*det*, it is probably the case that the frequency and semantic flexibility of the F-*så* clause format are mutually strengthening. Due to its semantic flexibility, it can effectively be used as a placeholder by the speaker before they have decided upon the full format of a clause, as long as they have decided the primary pragmatic function of the clause, i.e. to provide an assertion which somehow follows (from) the preceding discourse. The extreme frequency of the construction leads to polysemy, which is to be expected (e.g. Langacker 1995; see Geeraerts 1993 for a critical discussion of the notion of polysemy).

As a slight diversion, it is noteworthy that the conjunction *så* in lines 7 and 9 seems to perform similar pragmatic functions. The conjunction and adverb are far from identical; in fact, they have different phonetic, distributional and interactional properties. The conjunction occupies the connector field in Diderichsen's clause model (Table 1 above). It can be realized with creaky voice and can be prolonged, as in line 7, which is not the case for adverbial *så*. *Så* in line 7 is realized as what Jefferson (1983:6) calls a trail-off conjunction, which means that there is speaker-transition relevance following it, which is also not the case for adverbial *så*. In spite of their multiple differences, conjunctive and adverbial *så* have certain semantic and pragmatic similarities, and part of the function in lines 7 and 9 is to specify a temporal and conditional relationship to the preceding clauses. This may indicate that clause-initial *så* can have a placeholder function similar to F-*det* in talk-in-interaction, and that speakers need not have decided the format of the clause or the grammatical role of *så* in it when they use it clause-initially, but need only have decided that the assertion of the clause has a temporal or conditional relationship to part of the preceding discourse. Given the different options for phonetic modification and distributional properties, this is more speculative than was the

case for *det*. It is clear, however, that adverbial and conjunctive *så* must be closely conceptually related, and this is expected to have an effect on their usage.

Finally, it is worth noting that while it is fully grammatical for both temporal and conditional F-*så* to occur in the canonical position for adverbs in the clause model, they are only rarely found outside of F in the data set. This further indicates that the unmarked prefield is not the clause's subject, but rather a fitting discourse structuring device.

### 5.3.3 Topic continuation

The final frequent function that F-*så* has can be referred to as topic continuation. This use of F-*så* has the function of indicating that the assertion of the carrier clause provides additional information about a discourse topic. Thus, it clarifies the interactional purpose of its carrier clause.

This function is illustrated in (16):

(16) AULing | sofasladder | l.107

- 01 DIT: jeg fandt lige nogen øh fine billeder: øh af ham i dag.  
'I just found some uh nice picture:s uh of him today.'
- 02 da han blev ↑konfirmehh ↑ha [ ·hhh,  
'from when he was ↑confirmehh(d) ↑ha,'
- 03 CLA: [ ↑nå::,  
'↑oh::,'
- 04 ej jeg ↑troede det var nogen andre billeder,=  
'oh I ↑thought they were some other pictures,='
- 05 DIT: =han havde farvet sit hår sort,  
'=he'd dyed his hair black,'
- 06 → å så har han hår herved til.  
*and then have.PRS 3SG.MASC.NOM hair here-down to*  
'and he's got hair down to here.'
- 07 ((indicates length of hair with arm))
- 08 (1.2)
- 09 CLA: s- til sin konfirmation?  
's- for his confirmation?'
- 10 (0.5)
- 11 DIT: ((nods))
- 12 → > å så havde han sån nogen<  
*and then have-PST 3SG.MASC.NOM such some.PL/UTER*  
'>and then he wore these<

- 13            kæmpe    bhhriller   på  
               huge       glass-PL   on  
               'huge ghghlasses'

In (16), Clara has just asked Ditte how it is going with a mutual acquaintance of theirs. Ditte tells Clara of some embarrassing pictures she has uncovered of him from when he had his Confirmation, a common rite of passage for adolescents in Danish society. The sequence contains two instances of F-*så*. In lines 5–6, Ditte explains how his hair was dyed black at the time, and was very long, which she indicates with an arm gesture. The clauses in lines 5–6 provide closely related assertions. In the following clause by Ditte, in lines 12–13, she explains how he wore large glasses in the picture. Taken together, the clauses in lines 5–6 and 12–13 constitute a three-part list of physical features found in these pictures; Jefferson (1990) notes a general preference for three-part lists, and similar sequences are also analyzed by Selting (2007) in her work on list construction in German talk-in-interaction. The clauses in lines 6 and 12–13 have F-*så*, indicating that the clauses provide additional information about the discourse topic.

F-*så* indicating topic continuation is typically found turn-internally, as the additional information typically modifies a discourse topic introduced by the same speaker. It is often but not always preceded by *å* 'and', with the possible implication that a constructional status of *å så* is emergent; such a construction may be most prevalently associated with lists, but such a claim must be verified by an independent study. As with temporal and conditional *så*, topic continuation *så* typically occurs either in F or not at all, although it is not syntactically restricted to F. This is functionally motivated, since its meaning is primarily modal, and an indication of the rhetorical function of a clause is most informative if preceding the assertion.

None of the functions of F-*så* are topical in the traditional sense. The temporal and conditional uses can be said to have anaphoric reference, as their meanings are specified by the surrounding discourse; temporal F-*så*, for instance, is specified on the basis of the temporal setting of the preceding discourse. Topic continuation F-*så* has no phoric reference, as its specific meaning does not lie in any of the preceding or following discourse. Generally, this means that F-*så* does not conform to any traditional notions of topicality. For speakers, however, it is a useful tool for grounding a clause in the surrounding discourse, either by specifying its relation to what precedes it, or by indicating the interactional purpose of the carrier clause.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

This paper has investigated the use of the prefield in Danish on the basis of its use in talk-in-interaction. A quantitative study of 500 clauses was followed up with in-depth analyses of the highly flexible use of *det* 'it, that' and *så* 'then'. There are a number of discrepancies between this study and previous studies of the Danish prefield.

With a few notable exceptions (see in particular Hansen 1933), Danish grammarians have consistently claimed that non-subject Fs are textually marked. While this

paper has only covered in detail the use of *det* and *så*, these make up almost half of Fs in talk-in-interaction, and their usage does not support textual markedness of non-subject Fs. As an adverb, F-*så* is unable to act as the grammatical subject of its carrier clause, and the choice of F-*det* does not appear to be grounded in concerns about its grammatical role whatsoever. Some simplified preferences guiding the choice of F can be summarized as follows: if the carrier clause temporally or conditionally follows (from) the preceding discourse, F-*så* is preferred; if the carrier clause is grounded in the preceding predicate or discourse stretch, or if the carrier clause's assertion is purely focal, F-*det* is preferred. If none of these criteria apply, the topic of the clause is often a more concrete element, which is most often referred to using a personal pronoun, and which most often acts as simultaneously F and grammatical subject. A functional motivation for these preferences can be found in the temporal structure of clause formation; both F-*det* and F-*så* are functionally flexible and are thus available to speakers before they have fully decided upon a syntactic format for the message they wish to deliver, as long as they have decided upon the overall interactional purpose of the clause.

The interactional perspective taken in this paper is crucial to the results that were found. Superficially, the perspective has been important because the use of interactional data in itself reveals major differences in the use of F between talk-in-interaction and other types of language use. From a more analytical point of view, different considerations come into play in the contexts researched here than in other linguistic contexts. Because of the temporality of spoken language, little time is available to speakers when forming utterances, making them more likely to use grammatical constructions that are available to them with relatively little modification. This predicts that speakers are likely to choose clause openers that are pragmatically immediately available in the discourse, and that are formally chosen from a small set of frequent clause openers – which is indeed the case. Put simply by Du Bois (2003:49), '[g]rammars code best what speakers do most'. A related consideration that follows from temporality is the irreversibility (Auer 2009:3) of spoken language; interlocutors have no way of editing their message after the fact, making certain style factors that are important to the written language less viable. Another consideration that is specific to talk-in-interaction is how the action type of an utterance restricts its coding possibilities, with e.g. a pronounced preference for F-*så* in certain clauses in storytelling sequences.


The flexibility of F is of particular significance. The semantically and functionally flexible *det* and *så* are highly frequent, and there is a very low frequency of hapax legomena, i.e. unique Fs in the data. F-*det* and F-*så* are expected to be very frequent in part because they are highly flexible, and vice versa. They can be seen as partially formulaic constructions; in the case of F-*det*, due to its high flexibility, language users need not have decided upon either the referential scope of *det* or the format of the clause prior to using the construction, as it can be used to make an assertion based on a discourse entity of any size, and can alternatively be used with cataphoric reference or as an expletive. In the case of *så* used as a clause opener, it is possible that language users have not even decided upon its grammatical role before commencing the clause.

The interactional perspective taken here has presumably led to different results than what would have been found in other genres, making comparison with

previous studies difficult. Danish appears similar to Swedish in its distinct preference for known information clause-initially, and in mostly choosing clause openers from a small set (Bohnacker & Rosén 2008); expletive subjects in F are, however, less frequent in the current study than what has been found for Swedish. This may be a result of the different genres under investigation; it remains unclear how the current results would compare to Swedish talk-in-interaction.

The study complies with the general notion that topics/themes tend to be clause-initial, but the notion of topic must be extended so it covers not just distinct referents but also broad and diffuse referents. In fact, the preference for topic-initial clauses is most clear from the vantage point of broad-reference topics, as these are most likely to override any preference for clause-initial subjects.

While the preferences reported on in this paper are not absolute, there are good motivations why language users would make active use of broadly functional, partially prefabricated constructions in interacting with each other, and why these constructions would be particularly flexible in the early stages of clause formation. At this point, the language user may have a good idea of what information structural and interactional considerations should be kept in mind, but not yet what the actual format of the clause should be.

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**Acknowledgements.** I would like to express my gratitude to Jakob Steensig for extensive guidance on a previous version of this project. I would also like to thank Tanya Karoli Christensen for useful comments and literature recommendations for an adjacent paper. Finally, I would like to thank the editors at *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* as well as three anonymous reviewers for helping a great deal to present the current results in the best and clearest possible manner. Any remaining faults are, of course, my own.

## Notes

- 1 There are, of course, exceptions; notably the Finnish reference grammar by Hakulinen et al. (2004).
- 2 An interrogative frame can also be indicated with an interrogative pronoun, which is typically placed in the prefield regardless of its syntactic role.
- 3 This is admittedly a simplification. In both Lambrecht (1994:213) and Dik (1997), sentence focus is roughly defined as the information element that constitutes the change that the speaker wishes to impart in the available pragmatic information of the hearer.
- 4 Note that 'preference' is not used in the theoretical sense associated with Conversation Analysis (e.g. Pomerantz & Heritage 2013), but rather to avoid the notion of 'rule'.
- 5 Note that Thomsen (1992) considers both the full phrase and the 'reduplicated' pronoun or adverb to be part of F. This paper follows other investigations into the phenomenon such as Jørgensen (2013, 2016) in assuming that they occupy separate topological positions.
- 6 As an anonymous reviewer points out, the Scandinavian tradition in Conversation Analytic transcription (see Steensig 2001:36; Lindström 2008:18ff. *inter alia*) tends to stick somewhat closer to target language spelling than the English tradition. This means that words generally only stray from conventional spelling if they are known to vary in pronunciation; a high-frequency item such as *det* is thus always written with a <t> because the letter never represents anything in the speech signal (it is always silent).
- 7 Main clause constituent order sometimes occurs in subordinate clauses, particularly often in talk-in-interaction (Jensen 2011, Mikkelsen 2011). Subordinate clauses were included in the study if they were not subject-initial, or if nexus adverbs followed the finite verb; recall Table 1.
- 8 There is a prevalent tendency for the present tense copula verb *er* 'is' to either be incorporated in F through vowel lengthening or be fully deleted if F ends in an open syllable (Hamann, Kragelund & Mikkelsen 2012, Jensen 2012, Kragelund 2015). This is very often the case when *det* is in F, as can be seen

in the transcriptions throughout this paper; this indicates a very tight-knit relationship between the two elements, as has been discussed for Swedish by Forsskåhl (2008). The possible constructional status of *det*: ~ *det er* 'it is' in Danish is not touched upon further in this paper, but would be an intriguing area of further research.

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Appendix A. Transcription Conventions

The following symbols are used throughout in transcriptions:

,	global level intonation
.	global falling intonation
↑	local high intonation
:	non-phonemic lengthening
<u>x</u>	stress
°xxx°	hushed speech
>xxx<	rapid speech
#xxx#	creaky voice
x-	audible cutoff
·hhh	audible inbreath
hhh	audible outbreath
[ ]	overlapping speech
(.)	short pause
(0.5)	longer pause
=	latched speech (immediate turn onset)
((xxx))	description of non-speech activity

Appendix B. Glossing Conventions

The glosses follow the Leipzig glossing conventions (Comrie, Haspelmath & Bickel 2015). The following abbreviations are used:

1/2/3	first/second/third person
ADJZ	adjectivizing affix
ADVZ	adverbializing affix
COMP	comparative degree
DEF	definite
GEN	genitive case
INDEF	indefinite
INF	infinitive mood
MASC	masculine gender

NEG	negative polarity
NEU	neuter gender
NMLZ	nominalizing affix
NOM	nominative case
OBL	oblique case
PL	plural number
PN	proper noun
PRS	present tense
PRT	particle
PST	past tense
PST_PTCP	past participle
REFL	reflexive pronoun
SG	singular number
SUB	subordinating particle
UTER	uter gender