

## Short En bref

# Danish *rundt* ‘around’ as a postposition?

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### Abstract

In this squib, I provide arguments in favour of the view that Danish *rundt* is a postposition. The functional, semantic, and syntactic properties of adpositions are discussed, and I show that competing analyses of *rundt* are falsifiable while the postposition analysis itself is not falsified.

**Keywords:** adpositions, postpositions, word classes, Danish

### Résumé

Dans cette note, je fournis des arguments en faveur de l'idée que le mot danois *rundt* est une postposition. Les propriétés fonctionnelles, sémantiques et syntaxiques des adpositions sont discutées et je montre que les analyses concurrentes de *rundt* sont falsifiables alors que l'analyse de la postposition elle-même n'est pas falsifiée.

**Mots-clés:** les adpositions, les postpositions, les classes de mots, le danois

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This squib deals with the word class of the Danish word *rundt* ‘around’, a word that has recently been argued to be a postposition in certain contexts (Nguyen 2020a, 2020b).<sup>1</sup> This is interesting given that it is generally accepted that Danish is a prepositional

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<sup>1</sup>The following abbreviations will be used in the glosses: ART = article; COMM = common gender; DEF = definite; GEN = genitive; INDF = indefinite; N = neuter; REFL = reflexive; PL = plural; SG = singular. These abbreviations are only used when deemed necessary. In other places, English translations are used (eg. ‘the’ instead of DEF).

language. To the limited extent that postpositions (or postposition-like words) are mentioned at all in the research literature on Danish, it is recognized that only a few such words exist, purportedly with a limited distribution and occurring only in fixed expressions and the like (for an overview, see Nguyen 2019, 2020a). Nevertheless, in a number of recent publications, I have argued that not only are there words in Danish that can be used as postpositions, but also that they are far more numerous and have a wider distribution than has previously been acknowledged (Nguyen 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2022b).

This squib focuses on one of these words, *rundt* ‘around’, as seen in the examples below, where *rundt* follows the relevant NP (*rundt* is italicized throughout):

- (1) Hendes blik for forskrækket [stue-n *rundt*].  
 her look ran terrifiedly living.room(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG around  
 ‘Her gaze ran (circularly) around the living room in a terrified way.’/‘Her gaze ran around the living room (i.e. all over the living room) in a terrified way.’  
 (Example (1) is from the publicly available text corpus KorpusDK.)

- (2) Ni både sejlede [ø-en *rundt*]  
 nine boats sailed island(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG around  
 ‘Nine boats sailed (circularly) around the island.’/‘Nine boats sailed all over the island (e.g. on all its rivers and canals).’ (Example (2) from Nguyen 2020b: 101.)<sup>2</sup>

Modern dictionaries uniformly classify *rundt* as an adverb, and to the extent that *rundt* is dealt with in grammatical descriptions, it is likewise usually classified as an adverb (see Mikkelsen 1975: 101, 103, 467; Thomsen 1998: 78).

Note, however, that *rundt* may also marginally precede an NP with which it forms a constituent. This construction is noted in Aa. Hansen (1967 III: 308) and in the *Ordbog over det danske Sprog* [Dictionary of the Danish language] (ODS), which describes Danish in the period 1700–1950. According to Aa. Hansen and the ODS, in this case *rundt* is used as a preposition. A modern example is given below:

- (3) [...] bier-ne-s summen i stauder-ne  
 bees-the-GEN buzzing in herbaceous.perennials-the  
*rundt* kirke-n-s mure [...].  
 around church(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG-GEN walls  
 ‘[...] the buzzing of the bees in the herbaceous perennials around the walls of the church [...].’ (From the text corpus KORPUS-DK in the corpus tool CoREST)

The construction ‘*rundt* + NP’ is marked, and many speakers do not accept it. Modern dictionaries do not mention the construction, and in Nguyen (2020a,

<sup>2</sup>A reviewer suggests that in (2), *rundt* and the unstressed verb *sejle* ‘sail’ together form a complex predicate (which typically consist of an unstressed verb and a stressed element, see e.g. E. Hansen and Heltoft 2019). However, it seems to be irrelevant to the word class of *rundt* whether or not it participates in forming complex predicates. Even if *rundt* takes part in forming complex predicates, it does not do have to do so; see for instance example (4) below, where the verb is not unstressed.

2022a), it is judged as ungrammatical.<sup>3</sup> The construction is likely a relic from an earlier stage of Danish. Nevertheless, if Aa. Hansen and the ODS are correct that *rundt* is a preposition when preceding an NP, it is reasonable to consider whether it is a postposition when *following* an NP, given that the two constructions have similar semantics.

In principle, whether a word is a postposition or not does not hinge on whether it has a prepositional use. In Swedish and Norwegian, two neighbouring languages to Danish, the equivalents of *rundt* may also both precede and follow the NP. In the former, it is regarded as a preposition; in the latter, it is regarded as a preposition that follows its complement (Teleman et al. 1999, Faarlund et al. 1997) – in effect a postposition (or a postposition-like word). Thus, some scholars of Swedish and Norwegian seem to implicitly assume that a postposition must necessarily have a prepositional use; plausibly, this may be the case for some scholars of Danish as well. If this is true and if the ‘*rundt* + NP’ construction is largely unknown, it becomes clear why *rundt* in ‘NP + *rundt*’ is not regarded as a postposition in Danish. This reasoning is problematic: If it is true that a preposition does not necessarily have a postpositional use, it follows that a postposition does not necessarily have a prepositional use. (see also Nguyen 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2022b).

This squib aims to provide arguments in favour of the view that *rundt* can be a postposition. In section 2, I discuss the functional, semantic, and syntactic properties of adpositions and why *rundt* may conceivably be an adposition.

## 2. THE FUNCTION, SEMANTICS, AND SYNTAX OF ADPOSITIONS

Both prepositions and postpositions belong to the adposition word class. Insofar as postpositions and postpositional phrases (PostPs) exist in Danish, they presumably have the same kind of functional, semantic, and syntactic properties as prepositions and prepositional phrases (PrePs) (Nguyen 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b).

In terms of functional properties, we may conceptualize an adposition as a word that typically expresses a spatial relation: it introduces an NP as its complement and relates this NP to another element (see much more detailed analyses in e.g. Hagège 2010). For instance, the Danish preposition *på* ‘on’ in *Vi bor på øen* ‘We live on the island’ expresses a spatial relation by introducing the NP *øen* ‘the island’ as its complement and relating it to the verb *bo* ‘live’. An adposition may also relate its NP-complement to a noun, for instance the preposition *til* ‘to’ in *Rejsen til øen tager to timer* ‘The trip to the island takes two hours’. Parallel to this, *rundt* can be regarded as a postposition in examples such as *Fyrtårnene kan findes øen rundt* ‘The lighthouses can be found around the island’ and *Turen øen rundt tager to timer* ‘The trip around the island takes two hours’. *Rundt* expresses spatial relations by introducing spatial entities as NP-complements and relating them to a verb and a noun, respectively.

In terms of semantics, an adposition may impose certain semantic restrictions on its complement. The Danish preposition *imellem* ‘between’ imposes on its

<sup>3</sup>Interestingly, even the voluminous *Grammatik over det Danske Sprog* [Grammar of the Danish language] neither mentions nor discusses these *rundt* constructions, regardless of whether *rundt* occurs before or after the NP (E. Hansen and Heltoft 2019).

complement that it is semantically plural (Nguyen 2021a). In the same vein, *rundt* can be seen as an adposition that imposes on its complement *either* i) that it expresses a spatial entity that has a contour or a periphery (Nguyen 2021a), or ii) that it expresses a “spatial range over which a denoted action/state extends” (Kobayashi 2014: 21). In (2), the interpretation ‘circularly around the island’ presupposes that the island has a contour or a periphery, along which one can sail, whereas the interpretation ‘all over the island’ presupposes a spatial range over which the action of sailing extends.

In terms of syntax, adpositions are heads of adpositional phrases, and these phrases presumably have the same syntactic distribution, whether they are PrePs or PostPs. More specifically, if the string ‘NP + *rundt*’ is a PostP, it is expected to have the same distribution as a PreP (Nguyen 2020a, 2020b, 2021b). For instance, it is predicted that the string ‘NP + *rundt*’ can i) be fronted, ii) function as an adjunct, see (4), and iii) coordinate with a PreP, see (5):

- (4) [Klode-n *rundt*] har man oplevet  
 earth(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG around has one experienced  
 mange naturkatastrofer.  
 many natural.disasters  
 ‘All around the world, one has experienced many natural disasters.’
  
- (5) [...] hvis venner-ne kan fortælle om [NP rejser  
 if friends-the can tell about travels  
 [PreP til Asien] eller [Jord-en *rundt*] [...].  
 to Asia or earth(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG around  
 ‘[...] if the friends can tell about (their) travels to Asia or around the world [...].’  
 (Both examples are from KorpusDK.)

Thus, given that ‘NP + *rundt*’ occurs in the same syntactic contexts as PrePs, it is reasonable to consider whether strings of ‘NP + *rundt*’ are PostPs. If constructions like (4) and (5) were ungrammatical, the postposition analysis would have been falsified. However, the fact that the postposition analysis is not falsified does not in and of itself *prove* the postposition analysis. The data in (4) and (5) are consistent with other analyses: Other phrases than adpositional phrases can i) be fronted, ii) function as adjuncts, and iii) coordinate with PrePs. Perhaps one could view the predictions and the data in the following way: The more the postposition analysis is tested, and the more the analysis withstands such tests, the more the analysis is indirectly supported. If the above-mentioned three syntactic facts do not falsify the postposition analysis of *rundt* but rather indirectly support it, and if *rundt* has the same sort of semantic and functional properties as adpositions, it is reasonable to treat *rundt* as a postposition.

The postposition analysis would indirectly receive more support if the data ruled out all other analyses but the postposition analysis itself. It is by exclusion that the postposition analysis is deemed more likely, because i) it is consistent with the data and ii) all other analyses have been falsified. This squib follows this line of thinking, and in the next section, I attempt to falsify some alternative analyses.

### 3. FALSIFYING ALTERNATIVE ANALYSES

One possible alternative analysis of *rundt* is that it is an adjective. Offhand, the adjective analysis seems plausible because *rundt* may be used as an adjective, agreeing with the gender of a noun. In (6), the adjective *rund* agrees with *bygning* ‘building’, and in (7), it agrees with *vindue* ‘window’:

- (6) En                                      rund-Ø                                      bygning  
 INDF.ART.COMMG.SG      round-COMMG.SG      building(COMMG)  
 ‘A round building’
- (7) Et                                      rund-t                                      vindue  
 INDF.ART.N.SG      round-N.SG      window(N)  
 ‘A round window’

Alternatively, one might regard *rundt* as an adverb, reasoning that it belongs to none of the other word classes (the adverb word class being negatively defined; see discussion in e.g. Hengeveld 2023). As an adverb, *rundt* is not inflectable.

*Rundt*, then, might be an adjective or adverb. In the next two subsections, I consider two types of analyses: i) *rundt* as a postmodifying adjective or adverb inside an NP (see Diderichsen 1976), and ii) *rundt* as the adjective or adverb head of the construction ‘NP + *rundt*’, i.e. the construction is an AdjP or an AdvP.

#### 3.1 *Rundt* as a postmodifying adjective or adverb inside an NP

Consider an analysis where *rundt* is not the head of ‘NP + *rundt*’ but rather an adjective or an adverb functioning as a kind of postmodifier within the NP. Under such an analysis, it is expected that *rundt* could be omitted but the preceding NP could not. This runs counter to what the data suggest:

- (8) Ni      både      sejlede      ø-en                                      \*(rundt)  
 nine      boats      sailed      island(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG      around  
 ‘Nine boats sailed around the island’
- (9) Ni      både      sejlede      (ø-en)                                      rundt  
 nine      boats      sailed      island(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG      around  
 ‘Nine boats sailed around (the island)’

By contrast, these facts are compatible with a postposition analysis of *rundt*: Prepositions in spatial adverbials can generally not be omitted (as in (8)), and complements of prepositions can sometimes be omitted (as in (9)).

Consider also the fact that predicates like *bebo* ‘inhabit’ select only NPs, not PrePs, for example, and that such predicates cannot select strings of ‘NP + *rundt*’:

- (10) Aber-ne                      beboede                      [<sub>NP</sub> hele      ø-en].  
 monkeys-the      inhabited                      entire      island(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG  
 ‘The monkeys inhabited the entire island.’
- (11) \*Aber-ne                      beboede                      [<sub>PP</sub> på [<sub>NP</sub> hele      ø-en]].  
 monkeys-the      inhabited                      on      entire      island-DEF.COMMG.SG  
 ‘The monkeys inhabited the entire island.’

- (12) \*Aber-ne beboede [ø-en rundt].  
 monkeys-the inhabited island(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG around  
 ‘The monkeys inhabited the entire island.’

The data in (10)-(12) indicate that ‘NP + *rundt*’ is not an NP, and that *rundt* is therefore neither an adjective nor an adverb inside an NP (though *rundt* could still be the head of an AdjP or an AdvP containing the NP, see section 3.2). Note that (12) is not ill-formed for semantic reasons: Example (10) is near-synonymous with (12), and (10) is well-formed – as opposed to (12).

In contrast to predicates such as *bebo* ‘inhabit’, other predicates select for instance PrePs but not NPs. This is the case for the predicates *ligge* ‘lie’ and *bosatte sig* ‘settle REFL’, meaning ‘settle (down)’:

- (13) \*Han ligger/bosatte sig [NP strand-en].  
 he lies/settled REFL beach-the  
 ‘He is lying on the beach.’/‘He settled down on the beach.’

- (14) Han ligger/bosatte sig [PreP på strand-en].  
 he lies/settled REFL on beach-the  
 ‘He is lying on the beach.’/‘He settled down on the beach.’

- (15) Den har fulgt med mennesker-ne, efterhånden som de har  
 it has followed with people-the gradually as they have  
 bosat sig [jord-en rundt].  
 settled REFL earth(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG around  
 ‘It has followed humans as they have been settling all over the world.’ (Serritslev, *Dyrene i hus og have*, p. 22)

- (16) Termalbade-ne ligger [ø-en rundt]: [...].  
 thermal.spas-the lie island(COMMG)-DEF.COMMG.SG around  
 ‘The thermal spas are located around the island (e.g. along its coast).’/‘The thermal spas are located all over the island.’ (Retrieved November 15, 2022, from <https://www.berlingske.dk/rejser/wellness-oen-ischia>)

In (13)-(14), it is shown that these predicates do not select NPs but PrePs, and in the naturally occurring examples in (15)-(16), it is shown that these predicates can select strings of ‘NP + *rundt*’. In other words, strings of ‘NP + *rundt*’ are not NPs. Subsequently, *rundt* is not a postmodifying element inside such (non-existent) NPs, regardless of whether it is an adjective or an adverb. The grammaticality of (15) and (16), on the other hand, would follow under the post-position analysis.

In sum, the data in this section falsify the idea that *rundt* is an adjective or an adverb inside an NP but are consistent with the idea that *rundt* is a postposition, selecting the preceding NP as its complement.

### 3.2 *Rundt* as an adjective or an adverb heading an AdjP or an AdvP

It is possible to conceptualize the adjective and the adverb analyses differently so that *rundt* is an adjective or an adverb heading strings of ‘NP + *rundt*’. Accordingly, such

strings would be AdjPs or AdvPs. Considering the AdjP analysis first, there are at least two cases in which the string ‘NP + Adj’ is conceivably an AdjP: special constructions with subject predicate, as in (17) (see also Aa. Hansen 1967: II: 404–405), and regular constructions with object predicate, as in (18).

- (17) De er ikke deres ansvar  
 3PL are not their responsibility(N)  
 voksen-Ø/voksen-t/voksn-e.  
 grown.up-COMMG.SG/grown.up-N.SG/grown.up-PL  
 ‘They are not grown up enough to have this responsibility.’
- (18) Han malede hus-et \*{blå-Ø}/{blå-t}.  
 he painted house(N)-INDF.N.SG blue-COMMG.SG/blue-N.SG  
 Intended: ‘He painted the house blue.’

In the special subject predicate construction, the adjective either agrees with the subject (*voksne*) or the NP (*voksent*), or it does not agree with anything at all (*voksen*). In the regular object predicate construction, the adjective agrees with the NP-object (*blåt*). One may suggest that these ‘NP + Adj’ strings are possibly AdjPs<sup>4</sup> and that strings of ‘NP + *rundt*’ are to be analyzed *in the same way*, i.e. as AdjPs. But this must be rejected: Whereas adjectival *rund* does occur as the inflected form *rundt* (the singular neuter form), *rundt* in its postpositional usage is not inflectable and therefore does not agree with any element, see for instance (16). Thus, in examples like (16) *rundt* is not an adjective – at least not an adjective in a construction such as those in (17) and (18).

This leaves the analysis where *rundt* is an adverb heading an AdvP in ‘NP + *rundt*’. I have not been able to falsify this analysis because spatial AdvPs and PrePs have the same syntactic distribution. Offhand, the fact that adverbs (unlike adpositions) do not seem to select NPs speaks against the AdvP analysis. It remains to be seen whether the AdvP analysis is tenable, but answering this question is beyond the scope of this squib.

#### 4. SUMMARY

In this squib, I have provided arguments in favour of the view that Danish *rundt* is plausibly a postposition. I have done so by discussing some of *rundt*’s adpositional properties and by falsifying some competing analyses without falsifying the postposition analysis itself. It is an open question whether the postposition analysis stands up to scrutiny, and whether more plausible analyses can be brought to bear. I leave this for future research.

<sup>4</sup>Whether the strings ‘NP + Adj’ are actually AdjPs and which position the NP would occupy in such AdjPs are not important to the current argument. The point is that ‘NP + Adj’ strings contain adjectives and might therefore conceivably form AdjPs. The details of the internal structure of these strings are not relevant here.

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