

# State broadcasting as evidence of sociolinguistic change

How media language changes, and symbolic meaning changes with it

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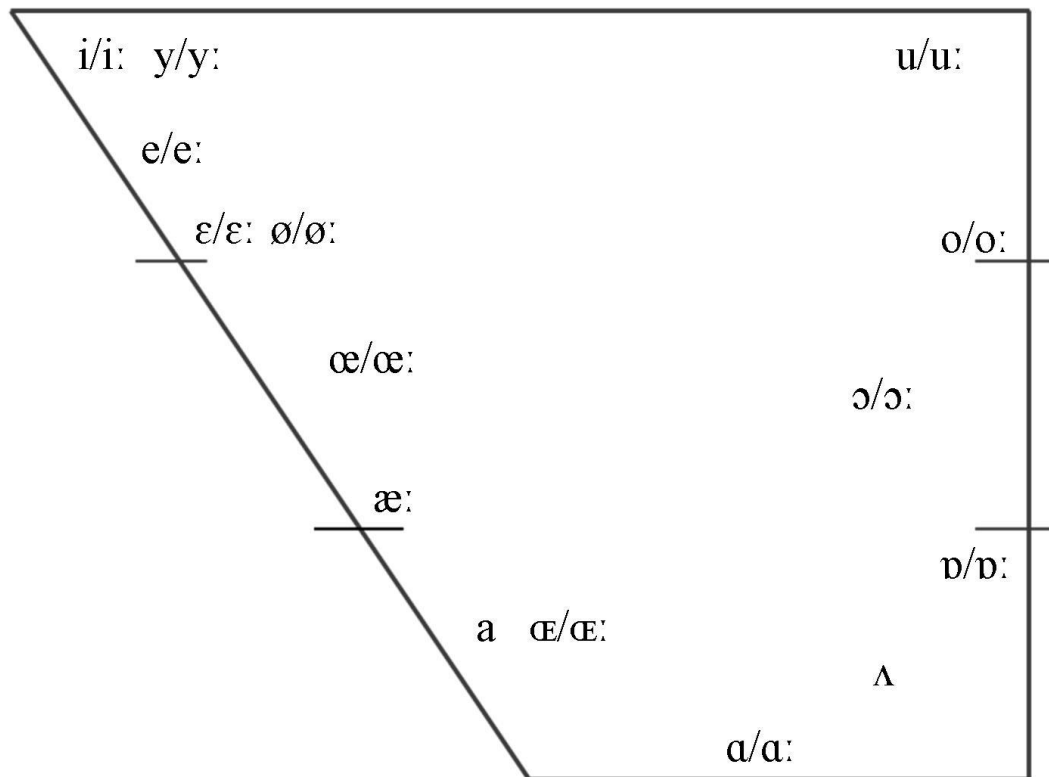
UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN



# From the Panel Proposal

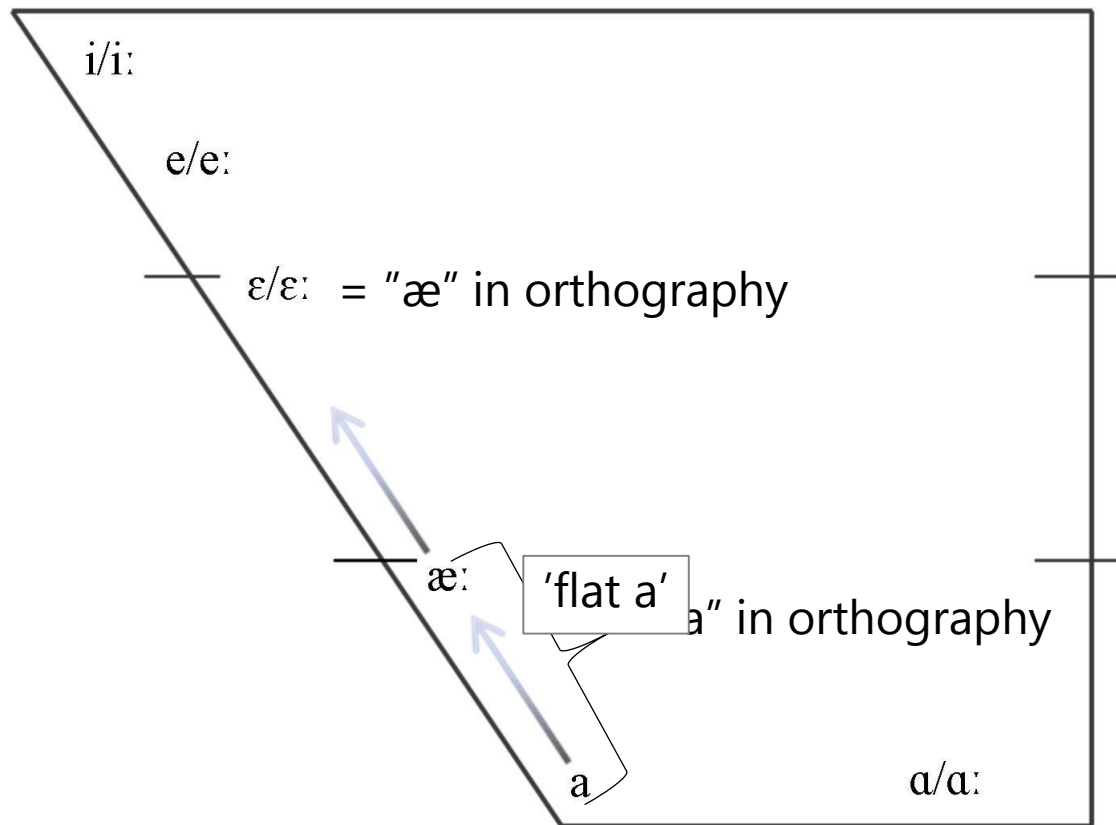
- “[...] the traditionally well-established evaluative distinction between ‘status/competence’ and ‘solidarity/sociability’ as positive associations related to ‘standard’ vs. ‘non-standard’ ways of speaking is being replaced by an evaluative distinction between a ‘dynamic’ way of speaking (more positively associated with the spoken media) and a ‘superior’ way of speaking [...]”
- Investigated: “partly by analysing the use and evaluation of language norm-and-variation in the new public sector which develops after WWII based on the spoken media (radio and TV).”

# The modern Danish monophthong system - a crowded system



Adapted from Grønnum (2005)  
Notice the modified IPA

# 'Flat a'



# The birth of the 'flat a'

- Georg Forchhammer (1895) mentions "the more [ɛ]-like [pronunciation of (a)/(æ:)] we normally have in Danish, and which is particularly noticeable in the 'københævnске' [a satirical spelling of 'københavnске'; the Copenhagen dialect]". And that the [ɛ]-like pronunciation "deviates from the 'purer' pronunciation [ɑ]"
- Philologist Brøndum-Nielsen (1940): "It is our sincere wish that the Scandinavism of our times may help eradicate the terrifyingly increasing [ɛ:]-pronunciation (in *gade, glade...*), a stinky fungus in the language" (quoted from Jacobsen 1973).

'Would you try to say A' (1962)

"Employees in radio and TV must be trained in better use of the language. This from an anticipated announcement in the Danish radio:

'Since quite a lot of complaints are made about the announcers' pronunciation of Danish, director Dahlerup will conduct an investigation as soon as possible.'"

»Vil De prøve at sige A!«  
Tegning af Herluf  
Jensenius til Berlingske  
Tidende august 1962. Tekst:  
»Medarbejderne i radio og  
TV skal have undervisning i  
bedre sprogbrug. – Af en  
forventet meddelelse i den  
danske radio: – Dæ der  
klæges en del over  
speakernes flæde udtæle æ'  
det danske sprog, vil  
programdirektør Dæhlerup  
snærest foretæge en  
undersøgelse...«



Jensenius (1962), in Skovmand (1975)

# Denmark's Radio – The BBC of Denmark

- Denmark until the 1980s had a broadcast monopoly (DR)
- Established 1925 with strong national and educational aims
- Focus on 'proper' language in particular in 'serious' programs like the news
- View 'proper' language as a sign of 'credibility'. Widely accepted as more 'proper', and also demanded to be more proper, than other language users
- National media reflect language ideals and disseminate language ideals (Mugglestone 2007, Bell 1983)

# The importance of *standards* in the media

## - Moral enlightenment

- “No one would deny the great advantage of a standard pronunciation of the language, not only in theory, but in practice. Our responsibilities in this matter are obvious, since in talking to so vast a multitude, mistakes are likely to be promulgated to a much greater extent than was ever possible before. There is now presented to any who may require it, an opportunity of learning by example.”

(John Reith, first director-general of the BBC (1924), quoted from Schwyter 2008:221).

# The importance of *standards* in the media

## - Unification and language planning

- “Most importantly, the citizens pay for DR. Thus it becomes everybody’s public service station to which you can have expectations and place demands. Denmark is a small language area, and therefore it is important that we can demand that Danish language is attended to and developed through the media, and that you are capable of communicating with all different groups in the Danish society”.

Minister for Culture, Marianne Jelved, 7 March 2013



# Standards in the *DR*

## - Stipulated by law

- DR is bound by a 'public service contract' with the Ministry of Cultural affairs:
- "DR must emphasize Danish language and actively participate in maintaining and developing the Danish language so that listeners, viewers and users experience [or perceive] a correct and comprehensible Danish in DR's program"
- "...DR must emphasize a correct and comprehensible Danish in the programs and lead an active language policy".

# Language standards in pronunciation manuals of the *DR*

- Albeck (1942): "A [a/æ:] must be kept in adequate distance from æ [ɛ/ɛ:]".
- Skyum-Nielsen (2008): "Especially among the young Danes there is a terrifying instability in the use of vowels. Many vowels are uttered as if it meant nothing if they hit home or miss completely, [···] an a-sound [a/æ:] is pronounced as æ [ɛ/ɛ:][···]".

## Research question...

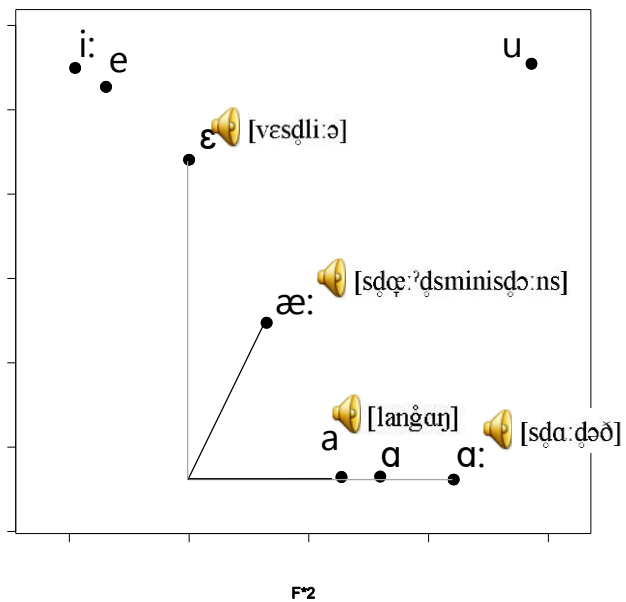
- For more than a century commentators have noticed that something was wrong with the (a) in Danish – it's becoming flat.
- The definition of 'flat a' is remarkably stable in describing them as (a) which approach [ɛ]
- Throughout the history of the National Broadcasting Corporation, 'flat a's have been stigmatized and proscribed against.
- → How have news readers responded? Have their (a) and (æ:) raised, or have proscription held the change-in-progress in check?
  - And what has this meant for the status of standard language?

# Data & Method

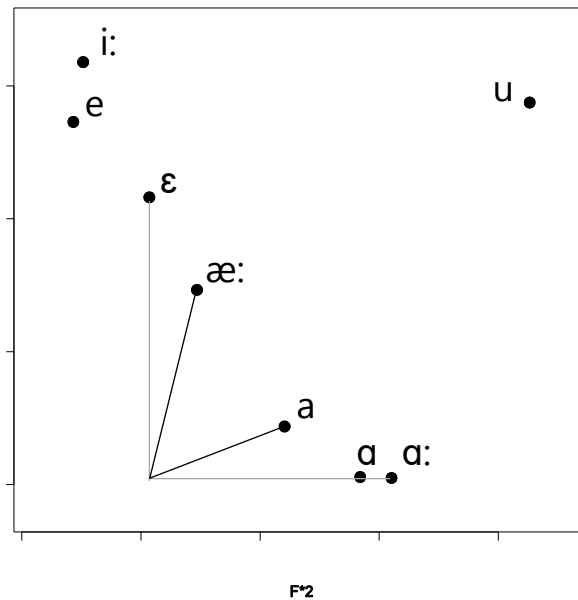
- Radio news readings (1956-2010)
- $\approx$  7 hours of news reading
- $\approx$  43 individual programs
- $\approx$  54 individual speakers
- $\approx$  7,000 vowel tokens
- Controlled contexts: Only the actual news readings, not e.g. interviews and reports
- Semi-automatic measuring method (see Thøgersen & Pharao 2013)

# Changes in the acoustics of (a) and (æ:) in news readings

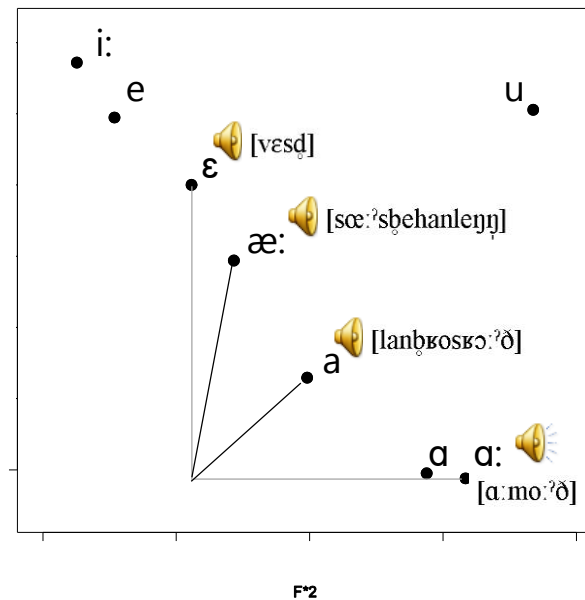
News 1950s – Group means



News 1970s – Group means



News 1990s – Group means



# Language change in the media

- Proscription against 'flat a' seems to have had limited success in stopping the (a) raising.
- Proscription against 'flat a' lives on in spite of the steadily raising (a).
  - Cf. Skyum-Nielsen (2008): "Especially among the young Danes there is a terrifying instability in the use of vowels. Many vowels are uttered as if it meant nothing if they hit home or miss completely, [...] an a-sound [a/æ:] is pronounced as æ [ɛ/ɛ:][...]"

# What is going on here?

1. Are radio news no longer read in 'the standard'?
  - *Destandardisation*
2. Have 'the standard' changed to include 'flat a'?
  - *Restandardisation*
3. Is 'the standard' (as described in the normative literature) no longer a symbol of correctness and something to be strived for?
  - *Changes in indexical value*
    - "[is] the traditionally well-established evaluative distinction between 'status/competence' and 'solidarity/sociability' as positive associations related to 'standard' vs. 'non-standard' ways of speaking [...] being replaced by an evaluative distinction between a 'dynamic' way of speaking (more positively associated with the spoken media) and a 'superior' way of speaking"?

# What is going on here?

- Are radio news no longer read in 'the standard'?
  - *Destandardisation*
- YES and NO
- If we take the standard to be an ideological construct (Milroy & Milroy 1985), then YES.
  - Policy papers and general comments still indicate that news readings should be (and are) performed in standard language
- But media ideals seem to be changing
  - From *nation-building* to *competitive infotainment*



# What is going on here?

- Are radio news no longer read in 'the standard'?
  - *Destandardisation*
- Have 'the standard' changed to include 'flat a'?
  - *Restandardisation*
- YES and NO:
  - Phonologically, what *was* to Albæk 'flat' seems unable to raise eyebrows today
  - Ideologically, 'flat a' is still seen as the antithesis to the standard (leading to some interesting re-interpretations of what 'flat a' might be...)

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- Are radio news no longer read in 'the standard'?
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- Have 'the standard' changed to include 'flat a'?
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- Is 'the standard' (as described in the normative literature) no longer a symbol of correctness and something to be strived for?
  - *Changes in indexical value*
- Mediated performances of (conservative) standard
  - How is it done?
  - What does it index?

# *Ugerevyen* ('News of the week')

## A segment in *Selvsving* ('Feedback loop')




- The DR, 1996-1997 and 2006-2016
- 30 / 8 minutes per program
- (Political) satire with a critical view on journalism
- *Ugerevyen* approx. 2 minutes on current news stories, in particular politicians' gaffes and celebrities, royalties etc.
- Lars le Dous reads (in his 'old style' persona) with sound effects and background music



# Stylising *the standard*

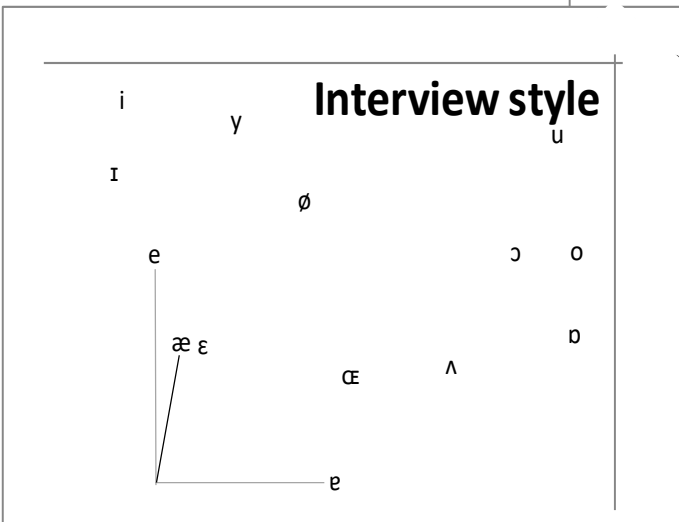
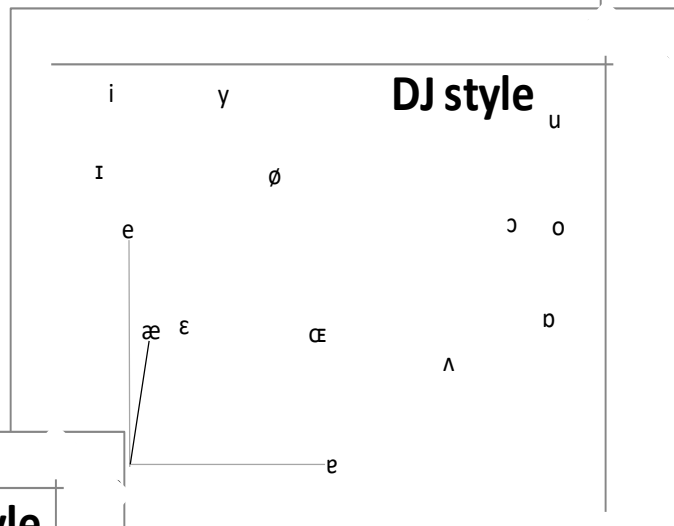
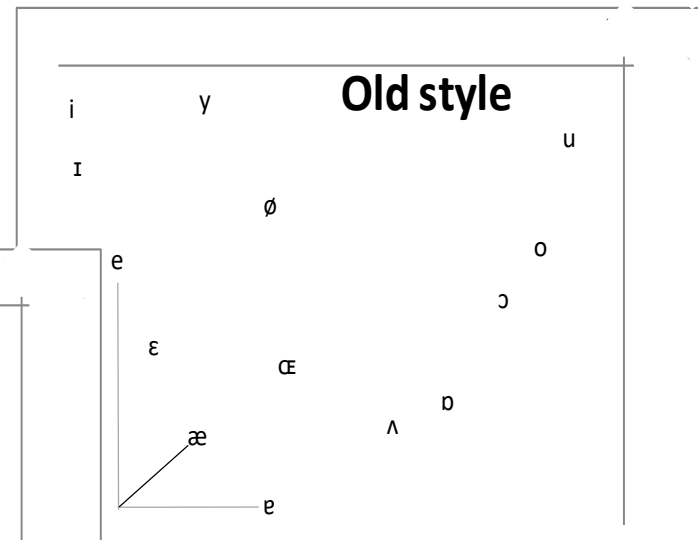
A comparison of Lars le Dous in three different media styles

- Reading 'old news' (2010's)
- Being an afternoon DJ (1990's)
- Being interviewed (on the radio) about his work (2010's)

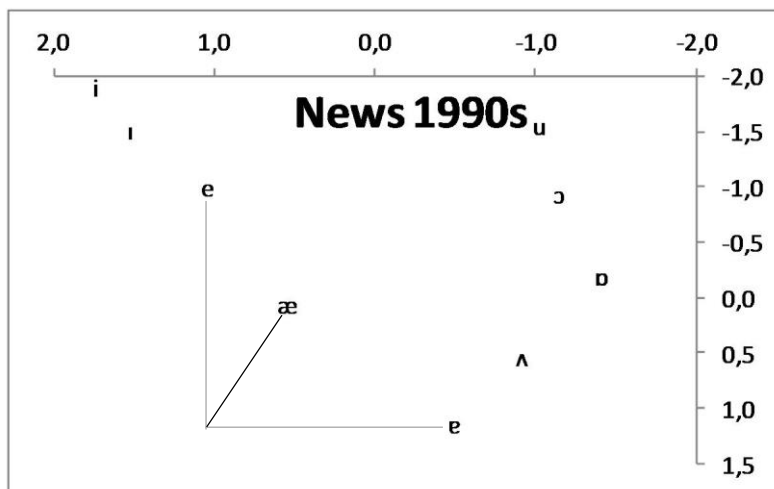
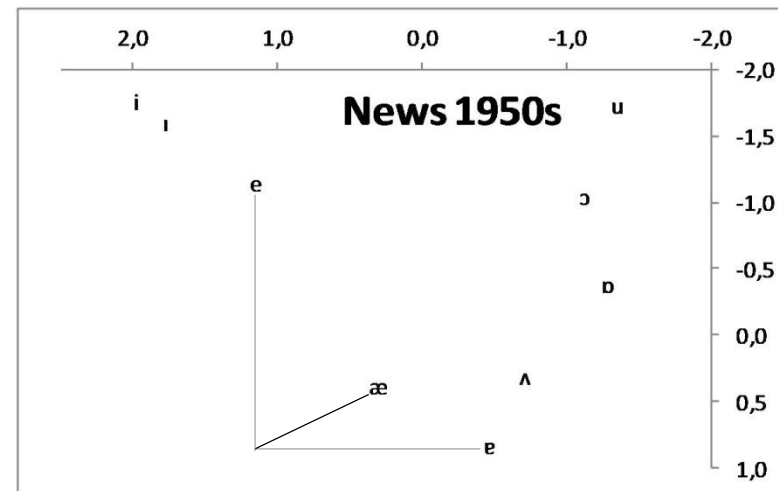
Style	Year	No. of programmes	Total length of excerpts	Vowel tokens
Old news	2007 & 2012	4 	498,4	680
DJ-style	1992	4 	373,4	573
Interview	2013	1 	680,0	752

# Vowel configuration in 3 styles

## Stylising (book) standard



# The news readers' vowel system



# What does conservative standard *mean*?

## The auditory scene

- Elements ('old news style' is equivalent to...)
- Intro: 📢
- Background music: 📢📢
- Voice timbre/technical quality: 📢  
(Recordings courtesy of Peter Lous, Selvsving)
- Characterological phrases
  - *men* 'but' 📢
  - *jo* 'indeed' 📢
  - *næ* '(but) no' 📢
  - *bare* 'just' 📢

# Welcome to the *cognitorium* (a la Dennis Preston)

- By using 'stylilised conservative standard' the speaker is performing ...

self-ironic  
authoritative entertaining  
mechanical everyday life grandiose  
militant cosy ironic sensation seeking  
non-serious orderly serious idyllic  
uptight snob jolly  
official feeling superior simple life  
optimistic rose tinted harmony  
light exciting unassuming  
think highly of himself



# A global register?



Het Gesproken Dagblad, VRT, Belgium



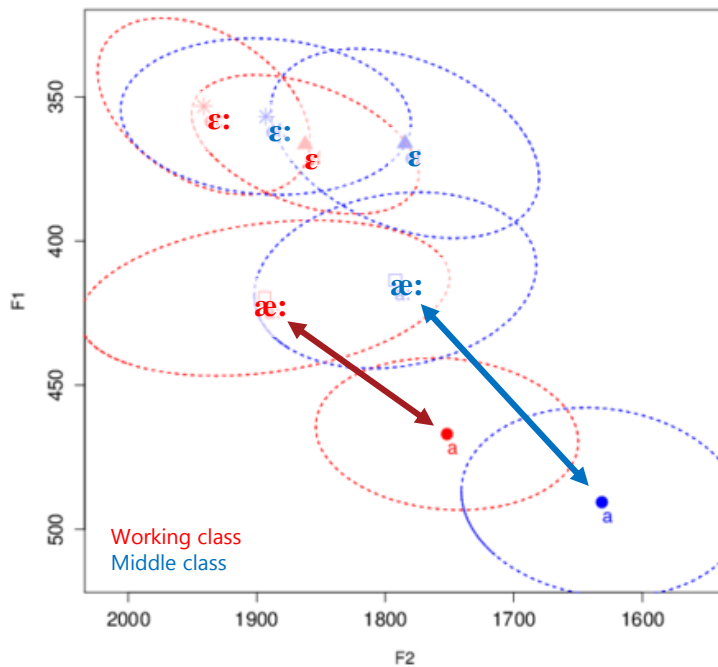
The Mark & Brian Show, KLOS-FM, LA, USA



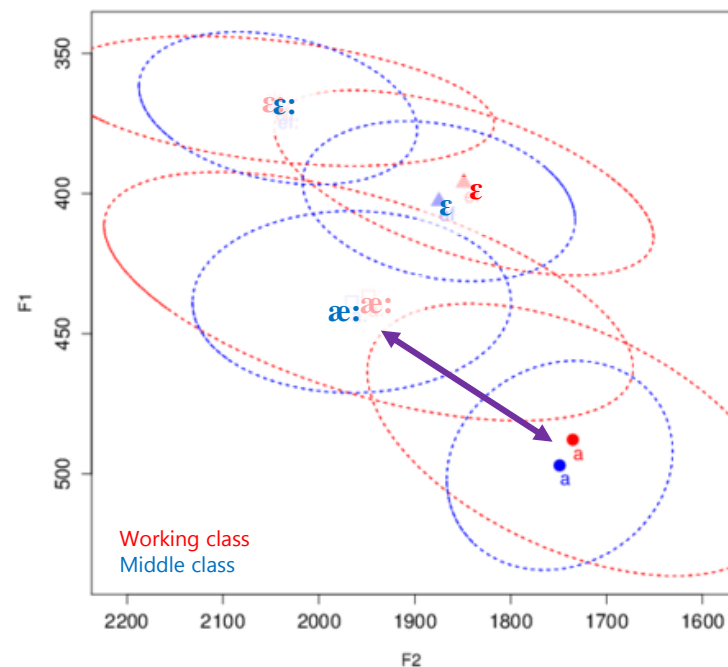
Armstrong & Miller, BBC, UK

# Zooming in on the variable in contemporary CPH speech – LANCHART data

40 somethings

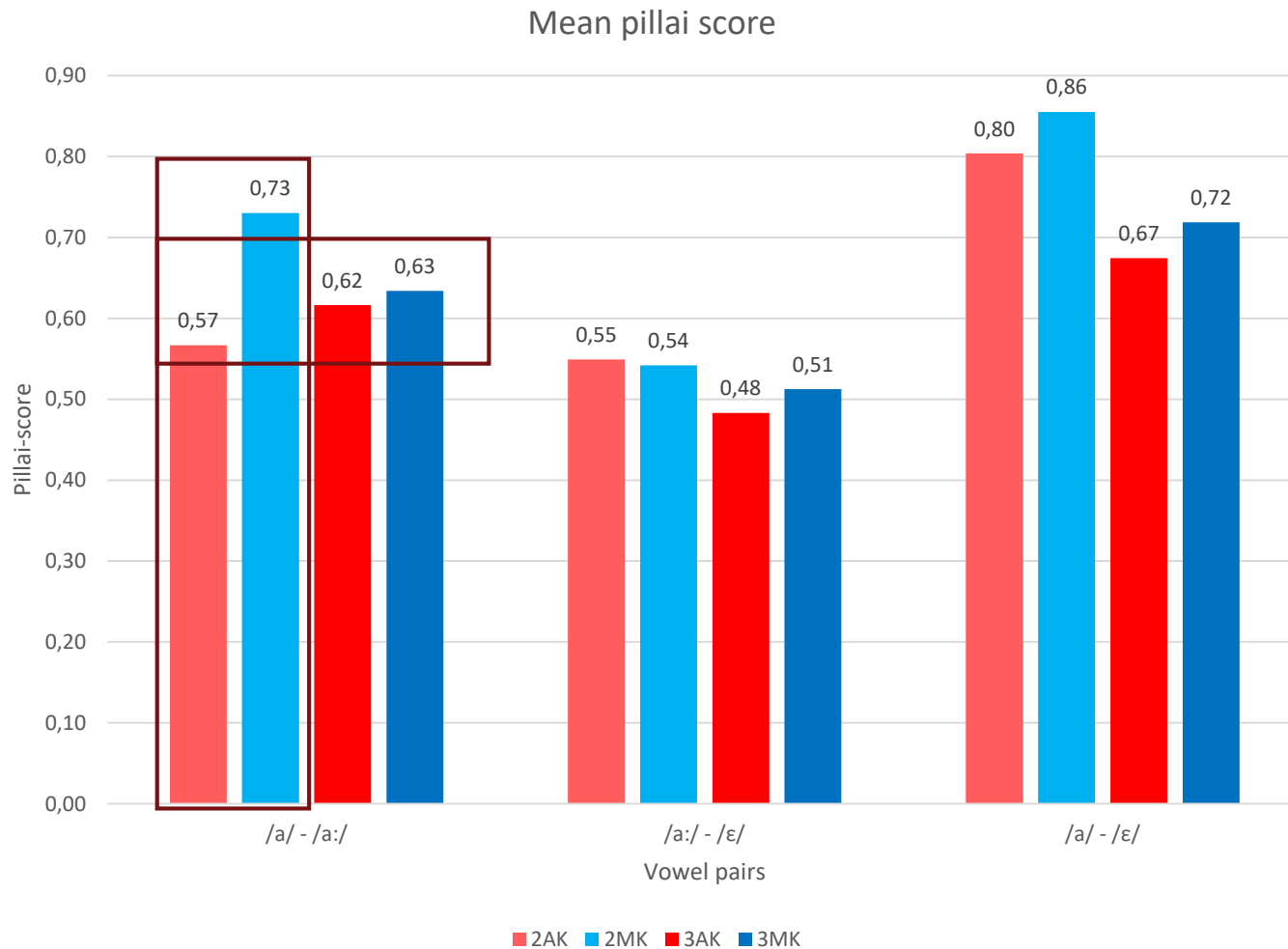


20 somethings



Short /a/ moves up and forward in **middle class** speech in apparent time

# Zooming in on the variable in contemporary speech – LANCHART data



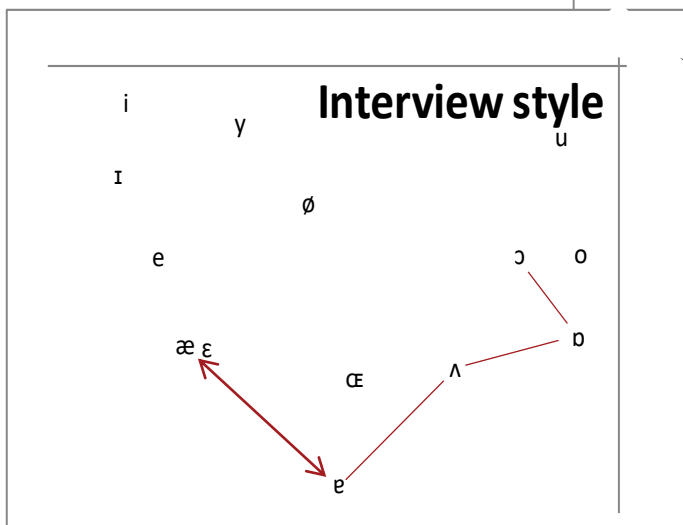
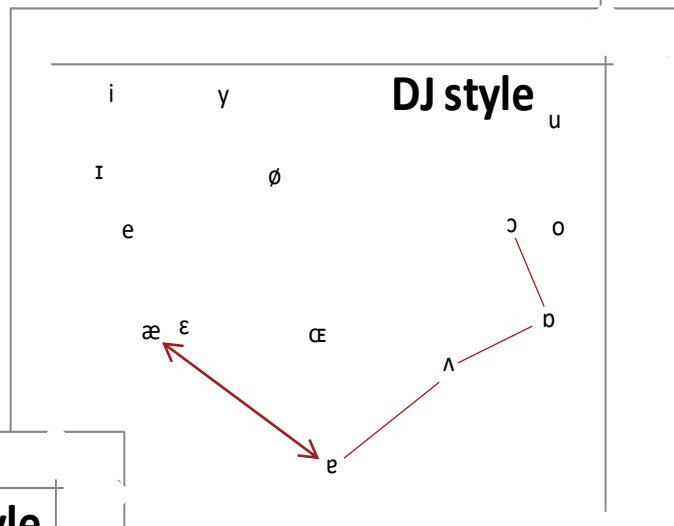
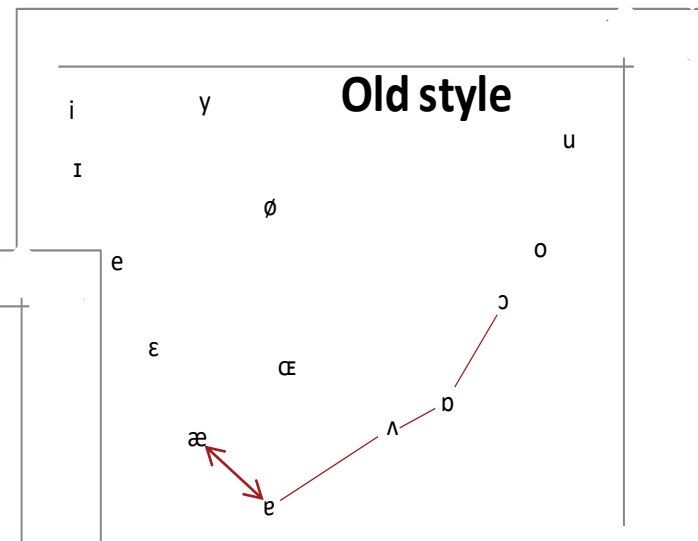
# How are media affecting language standards?

- Media ideologies are inextricably associated with language ideologies.
- Monopoly media of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century were associated with conservative standard – and the conservative standard came to be synonymous with the language of news media (Bell 1983).
- Changing media norms (*democratisation, marketisation, commercialisation*) can be seen as a reaction against old media norms (*paternalism* etc.).
- New media ideals therefore also challenge the conservative standard, seen as a symbol of old media.
- Media affect language standardisation not by mere exposure, but by negotiation of language ideologies.

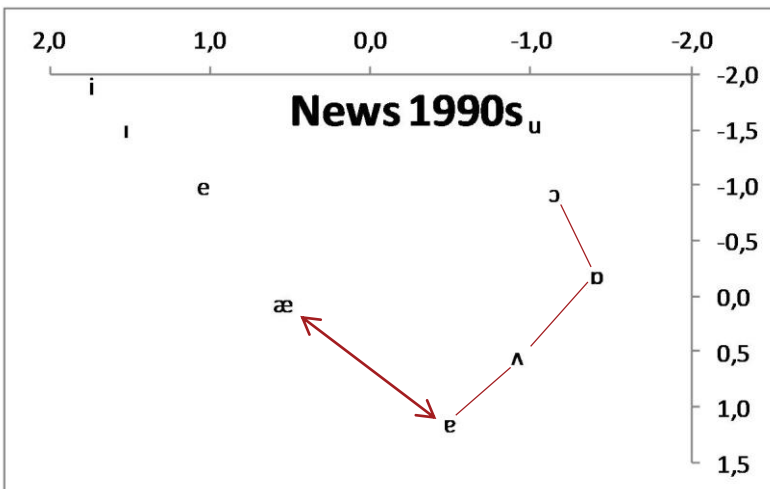
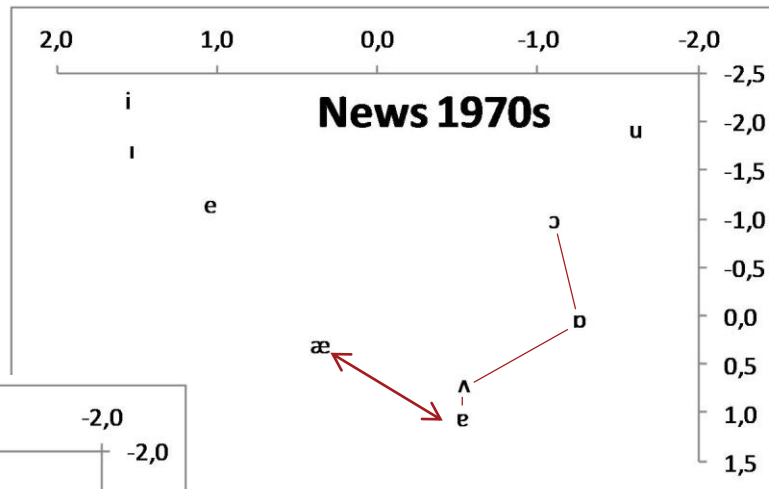
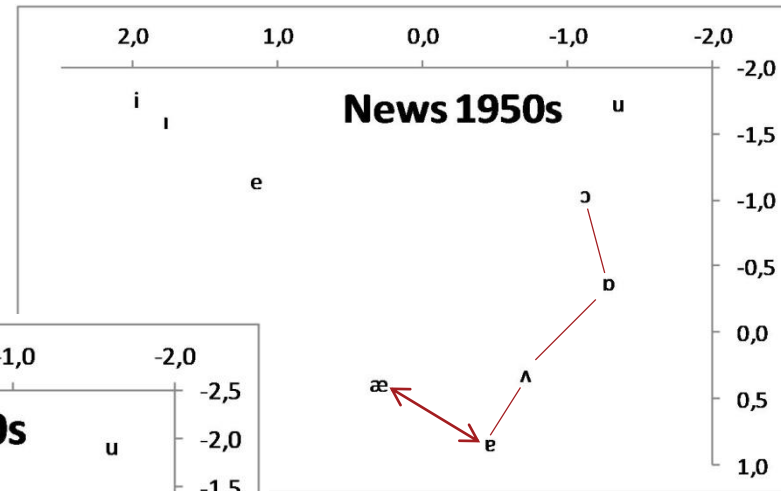
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# Vowel configuration in 3 styles



# The news readers' vowel system



# The importance of *standards* in the media

## - Mainstreaming

- “Television’s images cultivate the dominant tendencies of our culture’s beliefs, ideologies and world views” (Gerbner et al. 1980: 14).
- “When what people see on television is most congruent with everyday reality (or even *perceived* reality), the combination may result in a coherent and powerful ‘double dose’ of the television message and significantly boost cultivation” (Gerbner et al. 1980: 15).