# Language and ideology in Denmark

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This chapter has three sections. The first section summarizes the historical and economic bases of the Danish speech community. The second summarizes what we know about linguistic developments since 1900, and the third attempts to connect this knowledge to the various ideological currents characteristic of the period.

## SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Denmark as a linguistically homogeneous nation state, 1864 as a crucial turning point

Denmark arguably comes closest to realizing Ernest Renan's wet dream of 'one nation, one language'. This is a result of history. The once grand Danish realm was gradually reduced to only those provinces where Danish were spoken: Norway was lost to Sweden in 1814, and Iceland declared its independence in 1944. Most importantly, the (mostly) Low German-speaking provinces of Schleswig and Holstein were lost to Prussia in 1864. The loss of these rich provinces, in Danish history and contemporary ideology making up the southernmost part of Jutland, 'Sønderjylland', created a long-lasting trauma ostensibly threatening Denmark as an independent state – and crucially a Denmark which was geographically small and linguistically exceptionally homogeneous. This was indeed taken as the point of departure for the plebiscite which resulted in the 'homecoming' of a part of Slesvig in 1920 after Germany's defeat in the First World War: Those parts of Slesvig where Danish was spoken by a majority conveniently voted themselves 'home'. (The exceptions to prove the rule are the North Atlantic parts of the Danish Kingdom, the Faroe Islands and Greenland.)

### Denmark as an agricultural economy and a dialect community

At the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century the Danish dialects were surveyed in the majestic *Kort over Danske Folkemaal* ('Map of Danish popular idioms', Bennike and Kristensen 1898–1912). The dialects are conveniently divided into the dialects of Jutland, those of the isles and that of the island Bornholm. Dictionaries based on the *Wörter und Sachen* method have been and are still being written for the traditional dialects of Jutland (*Jysk ordbog*) and the Isles (*Ømålsordbogen*). Thus, we know that the agricultural nation state of Denmark was once fragmented into closely related but still structurally rather different dialects. It is uncontroversial to state that this situation was drastically altered during the 20$^{th}$ century.

### Denmark as an industrialised economy and the creation of sociolects

Denmark was late in becoming an industrialised state and agricultural industrialisation (e.g. dairies) has always been an important branch. Urbanisation in itself is not a feature of industrialisation but industrial cities are completely different from the traditional 'organically grown' species of city. The immigration of the mobile population from the surrounding agricultural regions to the new industrial urban centres created new districts and class divisions of the urban space which hitherto had been characteristically integrated, assembling persons of varying means in the same houses, albeit on different floors. Immigration to Copenhagen

peaked in the 1870s and 80s where the net in-migration figures are ca. 36,000 and 39,000, respectively (Johansen 2002: 162). Whole neighbourhoods were built at a frantic pace to house the growing working class. The industrial city became the locus of sociolects (on Copenhagen, see Brink and Lund 1975; Gregersen and Pedersen 1991; on Århus, see Arboe and Hansen 2009). To a certain extent the new housing areas to the South and West of Copenhagen have, since the 1980s, seen a new development when immigrants settled there in numbers. They became the locus of the multiethnolect or polylingual practices of the young generation (Møller and Quist 2003; Møller 2009).

### Denmark as a post-industrialist information society: Language use as a contextually sensitive practice

Increasingly, Denmark is becoming a post-industrialist information society where traditional industry is of less importance. The service industry has grown to become the most important single sector. Concomitantly, a rapidly growing public sector has taken over the care of children, during working hours, and the elderly, thus emptying the traditional family of some of its duties and functions. This has made it possible for Danish women to participate in the work force in unprecedented numbers. The effects as to linguistic development may hypothetically be stated to be more pressure to align with peers, perhaps creating lasting bonds within each, closely delimited, generation.

In general one might speculate that the contemporary individual lives in more fragmented spheres than was the case in both the rural and the industrial economy. Education has grown to become mandatory for 9 years and most young people study for at least 12, often in the late teen years combining studies with unskilled jobs in the service sector. During those years they are constantly and, through the use of mobile phones and the net, increasingly communicating with peers and only in institutionalised settings with adults, except when they join their families. Thus access to grown-up linguistic norms is mainly through instruction. This may be seen as a breeding ground for the development of context specific linguistic competences where the generation is both norm-setting and maintaining these norms.

The service-based industry (e.g. tourism, transportation, communication) is part of a global division of labour. This has led to debates on the most efficient way to equip Danes for a globalised present and future. One of the central language debates concerns the use of English in the Danish educational system and this relates closely to this development of the Danish economic base (more in section on internationalism below).

Developments within the media sector first saw Danish state radio become a powerful influence and then national TV channels. Media researchers identify radio as the central medium in the period 1920 to 1960 and the national TV channels as the emblem of media until satellites began transmitting a broad selection of TV channels, including a number of foreign language channels such as CNN, ZDF during the 1980s. From then on, the range of TV-channels available to anybody in Denmark is a question of how much you are willing to pay (Jensen 1997). Finally, the internet has become a very powerful source of news. Obviously, the internet is multi-modal making messages in written, audio-recorded and audio-visual form available to the public.

Danish media do not dub, but use subtitles instead. This means that English (or any other language spoken in the original product) is present whenever you turn on your TV. Since all the popular series are English-speaking, this has led to almost universal access to (in particular American) English in the Danish speech community. You may learn (some version of) English this way. Virtually all Danes are, to some extent, at least receptively bilingual.

English is thus universally present in the Danish speech community. But, in particular in the cities, so are a number of 'new' immigrant languages such as Turkish, (dialects of) Arabic, Kurdic, Pashto, Vietnamese, etc. This has created a need for an approach to linguistic studies which encompasses the resulting multilingual competence instead of focusing on one

language, be it the first, second or third of the individual studied. Jørgensen has developed a theory of 'languaging' to fit this need (Jørgensen 2010; Møller and Jørgensen 2009).

## LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT

### *The homogeneous writing community: The creation of a national norm for writing*

The history of Danish orthography has two focus points, both of them before the 20th century. The advent of printing and the religious Reformation both created a need for translation and a reading public for religious and pious literature in Danish. The main figure here was Christiern Pedersen, a humanist of European stature (Haastrup 1971). Pedersen's orthography was consistent and he was a prolific writer/translator (Skautrup 1947: 176).

The second focus point is the publication of Rasmus Rask's treatise on Danish orthography in 1826. This is a perceptive and lucidly written scientific treatise on the subject which had until then attracted the attention of numerous dilettantes. The superior analysis and the practical solutions led to the adoption, at the end of the century, of an official orthography based largely on Rask's principles. The story is documented in Skautrup (1953: 161–180) and detailed in Jacobsen (2010). Changes in this orthography have been slight or minimal since the official endorsement of (a version of) it in 1888 (Jacobsen 2010), maybe because any change seems to lead to fierce controversies in the public (Kristiansen 2003a).

Since 1888, then, there has been an official norm, since 1955 administered by the Danish Language Board, an institution regulated by law and placed in the Ministry of Culture. The Language Board collaborates with other such language planning organs in the Nordic countries and in Europe (through EFNIL, European Federation of National Institutions for Language, an association created in 2003, cf. www.efnil.org). The norm administered by the Language Board is in principle binding for all writing within the institutions making up the Danish state. Obviously, the law does not cover the press or Danish literature.

Since the Danish orthography ranks with English orthographies as being at a large distance from the spoken language, the inculcation of the national norm of the written language looms large in schools and studies of mistakes are not rare (Undervisningsministeriet 2002; Schack and Jervelund 2010; cf. Jervelund 2007 for a useful survey). Such investigations regularly fuel debates on why schools fail so miserably in this respect (as well as in many others, it is claimed). Proposals for orthographic reforms exist (Olander 2002; Gregersen 2007) but are not taken seriously. On the reasons for this see Kristiansen 2003b.

The distance from speech may also be important in other respects. Ideologically, the written language is the backbone of the nation state and many Danes believe that the orthography pictures the best pronunciation of Danish. This may be one of the reasons why Danes in general do not appreciate Danish. Studies by Kristiansen (2004) show that many Danes agree with the Swedes in seeing Swedish as a more beautiful language than Danish. Arguably, this lack of language loyalty may be one of the reasons why Danes so quickly abandon their first language and change to English whenever they meet a stranger that does not speak perfect Danish.

### *The homogeneous speech community: Dialect levelling in Denmark*

Dialect levelling has been studied intensely in Denmark and its outlines are quite well understood (Brink and Lund 1975; Kristensen 2003; Pedersen 2003; Kristiansen and Jørgensen 2003). Emanating from Copenhagen – the only metropolis in the country, the seat of parliament and the central cultural institutions, including the oldest (and until 1928 the only) university in Denmark – the standardised language gradually became eminently victorious throughout the country. The situation may be characterised in brief by stating that only such

variation as already exists in Copenhagen is found everywhere. This, however, should not be taken as an indication that it is impossible for Danes to place each other in geographical space by listening to each other's language. Clear intonational differences (Grønnum 1991, 1992) place informants squarely in extended regions such as Jutland, the Funen and southern Isles area, Zealand outside Copenhagen, and finally Bornholm. Altogether, the demise of the traditional dialects is a fact since they are not transmitted to the younger generation.

## IDEOLOGIES AND THE DANISH LANGUAGE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

There are at least three *general ideologies* which have shaped the Danish linguistic landscape: *Nationalism*, its counterpart *internationalism*, and *liberalism*. These three general ideologies have their origin in the political field but all of them have been influential as frames for language interventions. In addition, two *linguistic ideologies* – based on the research practices of structuralist linguistics and sociolinguistics respectively – have been forged and used as weapons in the battle for hegemony: *functionalism* and *variationism*.

### Nationalism

Having its origin in Herder's revolutionary concept of the ethnic nexus of *Volk*, language and literature, the 19th century cultivated the literary past of the European languages in order to invest ethnic identity with a historical resonance. The Danish scholars of the first historicist epoch, Rasmus Rask (1787–1832) and Niels Matthias Petersen (1791–1862), created a national philology focused on common Northern origins in the shape of Old Norse literature and equating this in significance with classical literature – or even hoping for a substitution of the classical canon with a Norse one. They did not succeed and the classical Latin and Greek curriculum remained the backbone of higher education for the entire 19th century. Obviously, there would be severe limits to the nationalism of an educational system which based itself on the classics and thus stayed in touch with the pan-European tradition. Yet, slowly but surely, the national language fought its way into all the domains where the all-European Latin had reigned supreme (Ruus 2005). The last domain was that of university degrees in philosophy which gave up the demand for Latin on the occasion of Søren Kierkegaard's thesis on Irony, 1841. What remains today of the previous Latin domains is found in medical and pharmaceutical terminology.

At the turn of the century, in the wake of the great change in the political system where the parliamentary principle was instated as a basic rule, the entire educational system and in particular the gymnasial system was reformed (Skovgaard-Petersen 1976). The traditional classics-based curriculum was given up and the subject of Danish language and literature was institutionalised as the most important one, at least in terms of what the Germans refer to as *Bildung* (Mortensen 1979). Thus the truly nationalistic period in Danish cultural history is the first half of the 20th century, from the break with the classical tradition in 1903 until post-war American influence changed the picture completely.

Yet this period builds on the foundations erected during the idealist historicist epoch. This research established Danish literature as the emblem of the national spirit (Conrad 1996, 2006). The idealist romanticist notion of the artist as the epitome of the national spirit, viewing ideas hidden from the populace, conspired with the educational cultivation of 'Golden age' poetry of e.g. Adam Oehlenschläger as the royal road to insights to create an idea of the literary language as embodying the nation. This idea is still active in Danish language politics and has recently led to a more or less forced agreement of cooperation between the Language Board and the Danish Academy (of prominent authors and critics). More importantly, this development has barred the spoken lects of the people (i.e. the dialects) from attaining the

status of national treasures, a status they arguably have in e.g. Norway. On the whole the Danish educational system is focused on reading and writing and not on listening and speaking.

Nationalism has two sides to it. On the one hand, nationalism is a liberation ideology creating equality between all citizens in a given region. This is the origin of bourgeois nationalism which arose as a forceful answer to the demands of nobility on power and privilege. On the other hand, by the same token, national equality is dependent on national birthrights acquired or achieved. This means that nationalism does not only include, it also excludes. Recent Danish politics has witnessed an aggressive nationalism denying the rights of immigrants until they have become fully assimilated both culturally and linguistically. Language is seen as one of the essential battle fields (Jørgensen 2003) and nationalism is invoked as a 'natural' defense against being 'overrun' by non-Danish or even 'un-Danish' cultures.

### Internationalism

The Danish socialists very soon gave up the internationalist position so typical of e.g. the Swedish Social Democrats, and the Social Democrats, by far the largest of the Danish socialist parties, early became a nationalist party. Internationalism has however reasserted itself in recent years in a new guise: The integration of Danish society into a globalised economy makes it necessary to attain perfect bilingualism, i.e. in Danish and English, it is maintained.

There is a special focus on the universities. Universities participate in a global competition for the best brains within the various fields of science (the more so, the more the field is internationalised, i.e. more in the sciences than in the humanities) and at the same time furnish the local community with specialists. The first function makes teaching in English an asset, the second one makes teaching in English at best a problem. The dual function of most universities creates tension as employees try their hands (and voices) at teaching in English and as students experience trouble in expressing themselves in class when forced to change to a second language.

Finally, the sheer dominance of English at Danish universities threatens to dwarf the numbers of students and researchers who want to study other languages such as Portuguese, Spanish and Chinese, not to speak of the traditional second or third languages in Danish higher education, viz. German and French (Verstraete Hansen 2010).

### Liberalism vs. state intervention

Advocates among the linguistics community have from one point of departure concluded that an active language policy was needed to modify market forces (e.g. Haberland 2010; Phillipson 2010). Nationalist politicians have reached the same conclusion, but from a different point of departure. Thus, strange bedfellows have united in proposals to regulate the use of Danish and English in the educational system. One particularly interesting notion is that of parallel language use, adopted by the Nordic expert group on language policy and used as a key word in the Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy (Declaration 2006). It remains to be seen whether the parallel use of Danish and English in the university system is more than a temporary phase. Strict parallelism would mean modifying market forces such that non-Danish-speaking employees, so-called international employees, would be taught Danish, just as Danish-speaking university employees would be taught English, both course types presumably focusing primarily on language for academic purposes. The reigning ideology in matters of language policy, i.e. domain planning, status planning, is however, a version of liberalism, either denying the very possibility of regulating the course of linguistic development or denouncing it as superfluous or even detrimental.

## Functionalism

By linguistic functionalism I mean the following argument: The standard language is functional in that it does not burden communication with unnecessary, or even superfluous, information about the speaker/writer, e.g. about his or her social background and/or psychological make up at the time of locution. Hence, every functionally inclined linguist must defend the standard language and contribute to its growth and influence. Various versions of this tenet may be attributed to Paul Diderichsen (1968) and Erik Hansen (2006: 114f.), two of the most influential Danish linguists in the second half of the 20th century. It is obviously connected to structuralism and in particular to the weeding out of cognitively irrelevant variation within phonology. Only semantic differences which could result in differences in reference mattered. The rest was not silence, but noise.

## Variationism

Opposing this version of structuralist functionalism, a number of linguists have articulated a variationist ideology stressing the importance precisely of all the information that was suppressed by structuralist functionalism. The variationists take as a point of departure the intimate connection between linguistic practice and the social identity of the speaker. This is connected to the idea of identifying the intentional speaker as the central agent (Jørgensen 2010; Madsen 2008, Møller 2009) while others side with Penelope Eckert's third wave sociolinguistics in placing the speaker in a community of practice (Maegaard 2007; Quist 2005), or rather argue the case from a social psychological point of departure, stressing the notion of group identity and social values (Kristiansen 2010; Maegaard 2005). What unites these scholars is a keen interest in interpreting all speaker meanings as projections of social identity.

Jørgensen has consistently pointed to the linguistic competence of the young second- or third-generation of original immigrants to Denmark in contrast to the prevalent deficit conception of such speakers. He and his co-workers have documented, particularly in the Køge project, how these speakers are able to navigate efficiently using whatever linguistic items are available to speaker and audience. Since these linguistic items do not belong to any one system of national languages, the term polylingual languaging has been coined in referring to the urban youth practice of using mainly Turkish, Danish and English linguistic items and structures.

Quist (2005) introduced the broader notion of style adopted by the third wave of sociolinguistics (Eckert 2001, forthcoming) combining a number of *in situ* social psychological as well as semiotic characteristics (e.g. screen savers and dress code) in clusters, and showing that these stylistic clusters were fruitful in predicting the linguistic pattern of variables among different groups. Quist and others have used this notion of style to argue that diversity should be embraced rather than rejected.

Kristiansen has pioneered the study of language attitudes in Denmark by forging a paradigm that investigates overt vs. covert – or consciously vs. subconsciously offered – language attitudes. Conscious attitudes are tapped when the informant realizes that s/he is presented with a linguistic stimulus, whereas subconscious attitudes are revealed when informants do not realize that they are participating in an experiment involving language. The contrast between the two ideological 'levels' is substantial and is found consistently among adolescents all over Denmark. In conscious evaluations, local dialects are treated more positively than Copenhagen speech, while in subconscious evaluations even the slightest touch of local colouring provokes a strong downgrading in comparison with Copenhagen speech (Kristiansen 2009). Kristiansen argues that consciously offered attitudes reproduce the 'official' (publicly available) discourse, whereas subconsciously offered attitudes tally well with the standardisation process which has all but eradicated the local speech forms and certainly not furthered their use. It will be exciting to follow the work carried out in the SLICE framework and see

whether the same relationship between ideology and use is unique to Denmark (Denmark as an exception) or rather may be found all over (Denmark as the first example of the rule).

Variationist ideology is firmly based on research, although this is not to say that this research is ideologically conceived. But I would like to persuade the reader that the variationist research programme has ideological *implications*, and that it should be supported and developed as a contribution to changing the linguistic climate so that the Danish society will move in a direction different from the one it has followed to date: Towards more tolerance not less, more variation not less, and more lects not less.

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