Vinderup in real time: A showcase of dialect levelling

The Danish speech community has undergone a dialect levelling process which has progressed further than in any other Scandinavian or North Western European speech community (Pedersen 2003). In the present day situation, traditional dialects have vanished altogether as a living reality, while regional differences reside mainly in intonation. In this paper we document variation and change in Vinderup in Western Jutland, i.e. in a marginal area seen from Copenhagen, the capital and only cultural and metropolitan centre of Denmark. Here, in a linguistically relatively traditional Jutland district, dialect levelling has taken place in only three generations.

We know from recordings from the 1970s that the adults spoke a traditional local dialect, while the language of the adolescents varied from relatively traditional, local dialect to regional standard language (Kristensen 1977). In the re-recordings from 2006 we have found considerable variation, especially within the youngest generation, born around 1960, where a substantial dialect levelling has taken place in most speakers.

In the next generation, however, born around 1990, all seem to be regional standard speakers, and apart from a clearly regional intonation most of the informants have only isolated dialect features. Focussing on a single family, we demonstrate how this rapid change from local dialect to regional standard language has taken place in real time, within and between the generations. This focus enables us to shed light on the complex interplay between gender, local affiliation and linguistic habits.


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