

## Good-bye to regional variation? The case of Denmark

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While *divergence* is reported to emerge as the general tendency when regional variation is studied across major US cities (Finegan and Rickford eds. 2004), *convergence* clearly dominates the - albeit quite complex - European picture (Auer, Hinkens and Kerswill eds. 2005). Arguably, Denmark comes out as the European champion if we compare how effective and successful the continent's many nation states have been in 'implementing' a national Standard language in their populations at the expense of the traditional local dialects.

It has been demonstrated that the national Danish Standard cannot be distinguished from Copenhagen speech. Furthermore, the variation and change processes found in Copenhagen speech seem to be reproduced everywhere else as an integral part of the standardization process (Brink and Lund 1975). We may talk about a permanent but always evolving distinction between a *conservative* and a *modern* Copenhagen way of speaking the Standard. The *modern* variants are the more vital ones in terms of spread. In addition, we may also talk of a *local* way of speaking the Standard, as variationist studies in a number of local communities from the 1970's onwards have established that local adolescent speech differs from the national Standard, if at all, mainly in prosody.

Traditionally, the variation within Copenhagen speech was associated with high and low social status; more recently, different associations with different public domains seem to have become increasingly important to its social evaluation. Systematized investigations into attitudes towards *conservatively*, *modernly* and *locally* accented Standard speech in a number of local communities from the 1980's onwards have revealed the existence of very consistent SUBCONSCIOUS reactions among adolescents - reactions that contrast sharply with the 'local patriotism' they perform in their CONSCIOUSLY offered evaluations. When unaware of giving their attitudes away in speaker evaluation experiments, young Danes react far more negatively to their own *local* variety than to either the *conservative* or *modern* varieties. *Conservatively* accented speech seems to be positively associated with representations of 'superiority' in the more traditional public domain (school and business), while *modernly* accented speech rather represents success in the 'dynamic' universe of the spoken media (Kristiansen 2001).

Should we see these patterns of use and evaluation as indications (maybe even predictions) that regional variation has no future in Denmark? Recently, a research group has revisited several of the previously studied communities in order to study change in real time. Through renewed collections and analyses of attitudinal data with a special theoretical and methodological attention paid to the distinction between CONSCIOUSLY and SUBCONSCIOUSLY offered attitudes, we are now able to answer the crucial question of whether locally accented speech anywhere in the country attracts genuinely positive evaluations from the local youth. In short: There is no sign of linguistic norm centres emerging outside of Copenhagen. The paper will report from this work in progress, which also focuses on the impact of speaker-gender and judge-gender on the social evaluation of the variation in question.

### References

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