

Plosives in weak prosodic positions in Jutlandic Danishes – variation in realization or representation?

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In the first half of the 20th century, the Danish speech community underwent radical dialect leveling. For this reason, most of the traditional Danish dialects are now extinct or moribund, and have to some extent been replaced with regionalized versions of the standard language (which has its basis in the traditional High Copenhagen dialect; Kristiansen 2003). The 20th century saw the publication of many descriptions and overviews of traditional dialects, many of them with relatively detailed phonological descriptions within the glossematics framework (for an overview, see Hovdhaugen et al. 2000). These descriptions are valuable, but generally speaking, they do not cover variation in phonetic implementation – even when this variation is highly overt – and likewise, make little note of phenomena such as optional phonological processes and lenition.

A large corpus of audio recordings of elderly speakers of traditional Danish dialects was established in the first half of the 1970s. This is an important resource, especially given the current state of the dialects, but it has rarely been used for research purposes (although see Gudiksen & Hovmark 2008). In recent work (Puggaard 2018, submitted), I have been using this corpus to investigate variation in the phonetic implementation of plosives in the dialects of the Jutland peninsula. This research has uncovered non-linear patterns of regional variation in the voice onset time and affrication patterns of aspirated plosives. These findings raise the question of whether this variation is only a matter of phonetic implementation, or whether it also reflects differences in underlying phonological specification. The plosives' behavior outside of simple onsets and in weak prosodic positions may provide an answer to this question.

Preliminary findings suggest that the plosives in question do not only vary in phonetic realization, but also in underlying representation. Note that in Standard Danish, the six phonemic plosives /b d g p t k/ all have positive voice onset time, and the underlying distinction is usually said to rely on the feature [spread glottis] (Basbøll 2005). Dialects with relatively low voice onset time in /p t k/ show patterns of lenition in coda and weak prosodic positions where 1) /p t k/ tend to lose their place feature and appear as [ʔ] and 2) /b d g/ tend to weaken to voiced fricatives. This might indicate that the underlying distinction in these dialects relies on the feature [voice] rather than [spread glottis]. Dialects with relatively high voice onset time and more affrication in /p t k/ show patterns of lenition in coda and weak prosodic positions where both sets of plosives tend to weaken to voiceless fricatives, indicating that the feature [voice] is not active in obstruents. Furthermore, if affrication in /p t k/ is merely the phonetic realization of [spread glottis] and not phonologically specified, it is curious that affrication is often the only thing that remains in the phonetic realization.

References

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