

## The first steps towards a phonology of American Danish

This paper addresses methodological and linguistic problems in establishing a phonology of what can be termed American-Danish, i.e. Danish as spoken in the USA by the first-wave immigrants (1870-1920) and their descendants.

Despite being mainly speakers of Danish dialects and not standard Danish of the time of emigration from Denmark first-generation immigrants and their descendants seem not to have retained dialect features to any noticeable degree in their Danish (Kjær & Baumann Larsen 1978). Whereas Kjær & Baumann Larsen analyse sociolinguistic factors for this dialect levelling, or standardisation, only few detailed phonological, morphological and syntactic analyses are presented (Kjær & Baumann Larsen 1973, 1978, 1981).

Recent research, however, has shown that Danish as spoken by immigrants of the first wave and their descendants has syntactic characteristics that point to a standardisation process (Kühl 2014, submitted). In my talk I will address a number of phonological and morphological variables that may indicate a standardised phonology of American Danish. The initial analyses in this project is based on a single-case analysis of the speech of one male informant, Holger Nielsen (1901-1976). The informant is born in the township Badger in South Dakota as the son of first generation Danish immigrants. His parents came from two neighbouring although distinct dialect areas in West Jutland (Denmark), West Jutlandish and North West Jutlandish (south and north of the strait *Limfjorden*, respectively).

The Danish-speaking community in Badger Township is reported to have been relatively isolated (Kjær & Baumann Larsen 1981), and in spite of the general tendency towards dialect levelling among Danish second generation immigrants in the USA, the traditional dialect seemed to have been relatively strong in this speech community. This is also the impression one gets from listening to four recordings from 1966-1976 of the speech of Holger Nielsen, which shows many clear (North) West Jutlandish features. However, neither the pronunciation, nor the morphology is strictly (North) West Jutlandish as it has features that are not documented in the literature for these two dialect areas. The features encompass:

- manifestation of /r/
- manifestation of the short /a/ phoneme
- manifestation of the long /a:/ phoneme
- manifestation of the perfect participle /əd/
- manifestation of the so-called *stød* (a prosodic glottal feature resembling creaky voice that is characteristic of spoken Danish).

The manifestation of /r/ show a clear distributional pattern, [ɾ] or [r] occur in initial position and after consonants, [ɾ-] elsewhere. /a/ varies freely between [a] (typical of older Danish) and [æ] (typical of modern Danish). Long /a:/ seem also to vary freely between [ɑ] and a more rounded pronunciation, approaching [ɔ] (unknown in modern Danish). The perfect particle is consistently pronounced [d], not [əd], and the *stød* does only sporadically seem to follow a West Jutlandish pattern. The talk will give examples of how these variables are manifested and it will be discussed to what extent these features of Holger Niensens' American Danish can be ascribed to the informant's mother-tongue (North) West Jutlandish, or whether they are influenced by American (Mid-West) English, or a sign of 'dialect levelling' (standardisation). The discussion will consider the fact that the linguistic

analysis must be concerned with the phonology and morphology of now extinct Danish dialects, phonetic details of Mid-West American English and, to some extent, an older standard Danish.

### References

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