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Monka, Malene

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Mobility and language change in real time

Synchronic studies of the interrelationship between mobility and language change leave us with some unanswered questions of causation. The most important question is whether language change is caused by mobility, or if mobile informants mark themselves linguistically different than their non-mobile peers prior to being geographically and socially mobile (e.g. Andersson & Thelander 1994).

In the presentation I discuss this question by presenting a real time panel-study of language change in 23 speakers from three municipalities in distinct dialect areas in Denmark. The language change of six mobile informants will be compared to that of 17 non-mobile informants. The first interviews were conducted 1978–1989; the second ones were conducted 2005–2010.

I present quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data. The two main quantitative results are that the mobile speakers use fewer local features than the non-mobile speakers in the old recordings, and that the degree of language change differs among the mobile informants from the three dialect areas. Based on the qualitative analyses I argue that differences in geographic and social orientation in the old recordings can explain differences between mobile and non-mobile informants. I also suggest a human geographic approach to place to explain the differences between the language change of the mobile informants (e.g. Britain 2009; Johnstone 2004).

Key words: language change in real time, panel-study, mobility, place

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