

## Grammatical gender in North American Danish.

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This paper addresses a central question in the literature on heritage languages, namely the vulnerability of grammatical categories in situations of language contact. I address this question with a study of grammatical gender in Danish as spoken by Danish immigrants in U.S.A. An often raised claim in studies of heritage languages is that grammatical gender is particularly vulnerable: “Heritage speakers of languages with [...] overt gender [...] produce a significant number of errors as compared to native speakers or even their own parents” (Montrul 2012: 174; see also Polinsky 2008, Benmamoun et al. 2013, Lohndal & Westergaard 2016). In other studies, however, gender does not seem to be particularly vulnerable. Johannessen & Larsson (2015), in a study of American Norwegian and American Swedish, observe only a low degree of deviation from the European standard languages. (See also Boas 2009 for observations of grammatical gender in Texas German and Heegård Petersen & Köhl (to appear) for grammatical gender in Argentine Danish.)

The data used for this study are extracted from the Corpus of North American Danish (Köhl et al. 2019), which consists of transcriptions of 200+ interviews with 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Danish immigrants to U.S.A. The corpus contains 512.000 tokens.

Danish distinguishes between common and neuter gender (‘n-gender’ and ‘t-gender’). The study investigates grammatical gender suffix marking on the noun stem (*bold-en* ‘the ball’ and *hus-et* ‘the house’) and on determiners and personal pronouns: *den/denne/min/din/sin/vor bold* ‘that/this/my/your/his-her/our ball’ and *det/dette/mit/dit/sit/vort hus* ‘that/this/my/your/his-her/our house’.

A preliminary analysis of 12,492 examples reveals no changes in the definite suffix. For the determiners and pronouns, only 3 % of all examples (293 out of 9025) show a gender marking that is different from Standard Danish, but there seems to be a hierarchy between the gender markers: the demonstrative pronouns *den/det* show most deviation (6%), the personal pronouns *min/mit* least (1%), with the indefinite pronouns *en/et* in-between (3%). Two other observations differ from tendencies observed in, e.g., Johannessen & Larsson (2015) and Heegård Petersen & Köhl (to appear): (1) It is not the dominant pattern that Standard Danish neuter agreement becomes common agreement, i.e. there is not a clear direction in the deviation from Standard Danish. (2) There are not more deviations in complex NPs with an attributive adjective (*en rød bold* ‘a red ball’) than in simple NPs (*en bold* ‘a ball’).

The paper will present the analysis outlined here and discuss how and why the overall result seems to go against the observation that morphological gender is particularly vulnerable and why the patterns observed differ from other studies on Scandinavian heritage languages. The analysis will include linguistic and sociolinguistic parameters such as immigrant generation and age.

## References

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