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REVIEWS

Dansk Sproghistorie 1. Dansk tager form. Edited by Ebba Hjorth with Henrik Galberg Jacobsen, Bent Jørgensen, Birgitte Jacobsen, & Laurids Kristian Fahl. Copenhagen & Aarhus: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab & Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2016. Pp. 476. Hardcover. 399.95 DKK.

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Dansk Sproghistorie [The History of the Danish Language] is a planned six-volume work, the first large-scale history of the Danish language since Peter Skautrup's *Det danske Sprogs Historie* (1944–1970). Unlike Skautrup's one-man effort, *Dansk Sproghistorie* is a collaborative work with contributions from no less than 87 scholars of linguistics, literature, history, and other fields. The book under review, *Dansk Sproghistorie 1. Dansk tager form* [The History of the Danish Language 1: Danish Takes Shape] is the first volume in this project, which is intended for both a scholarly and a nonspecialist readership and also includes an online platform (dansksproghistorie.dk) with additional information and audio-visual material. The introduction by Ebba Hjorth gives an outline of this and the remaining five volumes: Two volumes will deal mainly with language-internal subjects, such as morphosyntax, orthography, and phonology; two with the language as it has been used by writers and in different social contexts; and one with the interplay with other languages, outside of Denmark as well as within. *Dansk Sproghistorie* thus promises to be not just a history of the Danish language but also a history of language in Denmark in a wider sense, as it will include chapters on, for example, the education system, stylistics, Danish Sign Language, and the other Germanic languages (disappointingly, however, Frisian appears not to be represented).

The present volume contains 21 chapters, which are grouped into four parts: "The Sources", "Language and History", "Language

[*] I am grateful to Olga Fischer, Hannah Kousbroek, and Marieke Olthof for their comments on an earlier version of this review. Of course, all errors and opinions are my own.

Descriptions", and "Writing". It is thus a somewhat heterogeneous book, covering both the history of Danish linguistics, the written sources and different writing systems, and the relationship between language and history more broadly. As Hjorth writes in the introduction, it is inevitable that individual readers will find some of the topics covered more interesting than others and that the individual contributors will have different linguistic opinions and different ways of presenting their material (p. 10). In the following, I give a brief summary of the contents of the book, after which follow some general remarks and a more critical evaluation of some individual contributions.

Part 1, entitled "The Sources", consists of a single chapter, in which Bent Jørgensen provides an overview of the written and spoken sources for the history of the language from the introduction of runic writing to the present day. The chapter ends with an overview of the most important archives where primary sources—including recordings of spoken language—are kept.

Part 2, entitled "Language and History", contains five chapters. In the first chapter, Frans Gregersen gives an outline of the history of linguistics and the ways in which different linguistic theories have conceptualized "language" and the research goals of linguistics. In the second chapter, Bent Jørgensen introduces the periodization used in *Dansk Sproghistorie*, consisting of Common Scandinavian (*urnordisk*, 200–800 AD), Old Danish (*olddansk*, 800–1100 AD), Middle Danish (*middeldansk*, 1100–1500 AD), and Modern Danish (*nydansk*, from 1500 AD). The chapter by Esben Albrectsen discusses the historical relation between the Danish language and identity, while Adam Hyllested's chapter outlines the position of Danish within Germanic and Indo-European. The final chapter in this section, also by Bent Jørgensen, concerns the interpretation of linguistic and historical evidence and illustrates how etymology and language history can provide insights into history more generally.

Part 3, entitled "Language Descriptions", is devoted to the history of Danish linguistics. The chapter by Bente Holmberg covers histories of the language, beginning with the work of Rasmus Rask (1787–1832). Ebba Hjorth introduces the field of lexicography and its history, from mediaeval glossing practices to modern descriptive dictionaries. Lars Heltoft's chapter deals with grammatical descriptions of Danish, while Henrik Galberg Jacobsen covers orthographies and style guides. Hans

Basbøll discusses the history of research on Danish phonetics and phonology, with particular attention to how vowel length and *stød* have been treated.

Finally, Part 4, simply titled "Writing", contains 10 chapters on the history of writing. They are ordered chronologically, beginning with the runic period (Michael Lerche Nielsen), and then covering mediaeval paleography (Aage Andersen) and epigraphy (Niels Haastrup), handwriting in the early modern period (Andersen again), writing in public places (Bent Jørgensen), printing (Ervin Nielsen), handwriting in the present age (Bent Rohde), digital writing (Henrik Birkvig), shorthand (Finn Holle), and finally braille (John Heilbrunn & Kurt Nielsen).

As one might expect of a volume with eighteen contributors, there is much variation between the individual chapters, both in terms of general scope and implied audience. Some contributions provide expert treatments on specialized topics, such as the chapters on runology and mediaeval paleography, while others are probably more readily approachable for the casual reader. A number of chapters connect the linguistic developments to changes in society more generally, highlighting how the study of language can be rewarding for other disciplines as well, and I hope that many other readers will enjoy learning about the politics of typography in the 19th century (Ervin Nielsen's chapter), the pioneering role of female stenographers in the Danish parliament (Finn Holle), and the linguistic evidence for prehistoric contact with neighboring Baltic, Slavic, and Finno-Ugric peoples (Adam Hyllested). A good starting point is Bent Jørgensen's excellent chapter on historical evidence, which is freely available online in an earlier version (Jørgensen 2014).

The individual authors have obviously enjoyed a high degree of freedom in preparing their contributions, a fact also stressed in the introduction. The drawback to this editorial decision is that the volume, rather than appearing as a coherent whole, has the character of a collection of independent essays with little internal cross-referencing and dialogue between the contributions. While the contributors should of course be allowed to have diverging opinions, such differences could have been pointed out to the reader and discussed much more explicitly. The online platform also gives the impression of a lack of a clear vision and overarching goal. While a few authors, notably Hans Basbøll, have made good use of the website and provided substantial additional content

to the text in the book, more often the extra material is merely a hyperlink or an audio file, and more than half of the chapters (13 out of 21) do not use the online platform at all. The result is a mostly empty website, which is unlikely to inspire much enthusiasm in interested readers. Hopefully, this will be improved with the publication of the coming volumes and the addition of more content.

The lack of coordination between the chapters is perhaps most evident in the second part, "Language and History". Frans Gregersen begins his contribution on language history and linguistic theory by suggesting that the inclusion of such a chapter may be somewhat of a statement (p. 35), but it does not seem too controversial that a large-scale work on the history of a language should also consider its own object of study: What is (a) language, what do we mean when we speak of the history of a language, and, crucially, how is one language delimited from the next? The Mainland Scandinavian languages are a textbook example of how mutually intelligible dialects can come to be regarded as separate languages, and from a volume entitled *Danish Takes Shape* one might reasonably expect that this question would be dealt with, for instance, by considering the role of the printing press, the Reformation, Romanticism, and the introduction of compulsory education in developing and reinforcing a national standard.

Yet this opportunity is missed entirely, and there is no consideration of the delimitation problem in the remainder of the book. In the chapter immediately following Gregersen's, "Language and Identity", Esben Albrectsen simply states that "Dansk blev i middelalderen et selvstændigt sprog" [in the Middle Ages, Danish became an independent language] (p. 93)—a meaningless statement if one does not define what an "independent" language is. Albrectsen makes no attempt at defining the notoriously problematic term *identity* either, but merely provides an inventory of people from the last millennium who have declared themselves Danish. While it is acknowledged several times that the evidence is sparse, the author does not hesitate to make claims about people's identities and linguistic ideologies based on literary and other written evidence. A case in point is the reference to a passage in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, where two Norwegians are said to be fluent in Danish ("Danice facundos lingue"), which according to Albrectsen "forudsætter at Saxo regner med en forskel på de to sprog" [presupposes that Saxo considers the two languages distinct] (p. 93). This conclusion is dubious

at best. First, Mediaeval Latin *lingua* does not necessarily correspond to "language" in the modern sense; it may also correspond to "dialect", "manner of speaking", etc.[1] Second, as Berg (2016:40) points out, the passage in question describes events that take place in a mythological past, and one should probably be very cautious about using it as evidence of the linguistic situation in Saxo's time. In addition to such doubtful interpretations, Albrectsen also seems to have overlooked a number of sources suggesting an alternative story, namely, that the idea of Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian as distinct languages may be a much more recent one. In a 1506 letter from the Swedish to the Danish Privy Council, it is stated that "wij ære alle eth twngomaall" [we are all of one tongue] (Skautrup 1944–70, II:36), and a number of other mediaeval and early modern sources contain similar statements or use the terms *Danish* and *Norwegian* interchangeably (Berg 2016:38–45; for a Norwegian perspective see also Sandøy 2000).

The delimitation problem is also left unaddressed in Adam Hyllested's chapter, entitled "The Language Family", even though dialectal variation and the influence of standardization are referred to several times. For instance, Hyllested argues that there are "…gode sproghistoriske argumenter" [good historical linguistic arguments] (p. 130) for regarding Övdalian and the Närpes dialect of Ostrobothnian as independent languages rather than dialects of Swedish, as they have traditionally been classified. One wonders what these linguistic arguments are, and whether, according to the same criteria, (standard) Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian would still be considered independent languages. Furthermore, while it is stated that linguists should ideally take all dialects into account, not just the standard languages (p. 130), it is often not indicated whether the historical changes under discussion are shared by all the dialects of present-day Denmark or limited to the standard language or a subset of dialects. The result is not only that some nonstandard features are overlooked, but also that the term *Danish* is

[1] See, for instance, the well-known description of England in Ranulf Higden's 14th-century history work *Polychronicon*. Higden uses *lingua* both for the languages of other peoples, such as *Normannica lingua* 'the Norman tongue/language', and for the different varieties spoken within England, such as *lingua Northimbrorum* 'the Northumbrian tongue/dialect' (Babington 1869:156–162).

applied inconsistently, as it sometimes refers to a cluster of dialects and sometimes only to the standard language (*dansk rigsmål*). For instance, the loss of initial /h/ in the clusters /hj/ and /hv/ is said to have happened in the 13th century (p. 147), but this is not true for the whole linguistic area and ought to have been qualified: In most of the dialects of Jutland, the clusters /hj/ and /hv/ survived into the modern period (see Skautrup 1944–70, I:251).[2]

Another contribution that feels like somewhat of a missed opportunity is Lars Heltoft's chapter on the research history on Danish grammar. In an editorial note at the beginning of the chapter, it is announced that the main text will cover only the most important grammars from the last hundred years, while pre-20th-century grammarians are treated in info-boxes written by the editors. Why this organization of the chapter has been chosen is not explained, but it gives the impression of an unfinished product that does not do justice to the material, and the large info-boxes are distracting to the reader and often not very informative. Many of them merely provide lists of terms and references. In fact, only a single pre-20th-century linguist, Erik Pontoppidan (1616–1678), gets his own info-box. It is especially disappointing not to find any discussion of the—largely overlooked—grammatical work of Jens Pedersen Høysgaard (1698–1773). His work on phonology is treated in Basbøll's chapter (pp. 282–286), but otherwise he is only mentioned in passing throughout the volume (for example, by Gregersen, p. 44, who characterizes his work as "brilliant"). Heltoft's text mainly deals with theoretical changes in the analysis of word order in modern standard Danish, which means that grammatical work on both nonstandard and historical Danish is neglected as well. For instance, Brøndum-Nielsen's (1928–1974) grammar of Old and Middle

[2] An additional remark on a Middle Danish development: Hyllested writes that the 3rd person singular masculine accusative pronoun *han* (from Old Norse *hann*) was replaced by the dative form (from Old Norse *honom*) because the accusative and nominative forms were identical (p. 151). I find this functional explanation unconvincing. First, it leaves unexplained why there was nominative–accusative syncretism in the pronoun to begin with (as there still is in Modern Icelandic). Second, the same change happened to the Middle English 3rd person singular masculine accusative pronoun *hine*, which was replaced by the dative form *him* even though it was always distinct from the nominative form *he* (see Lass 1992:116–118).

Danish, which would seem to me to deserve a prominent place in a history of scholarship, is not mentioned at all (apart from a brief reference in Holmberg's chapter, pp. 205–206).

As I mentioned in the beginning of this review, *Dansk Sproghistorie 1* is a rather heterogeneous volume with contributions on a number of disparate subjects. Perhaps this is to be expected of this type of introductory volume, but as I have also argued, the volume as a whole would have benefitted from more cross-referencing and discussion between the individual contributions. Better coordination of the chapters might also have led to a less cursory treatment of pre-20th-century grammars and grammars of nonstandard and historical Danish, which appear to some extent to have fallen through the cracks in the present volume. On a more positive note, even if *Dansk Sproghistorie 1* as a whole could have been more coherent, the individual contributions are generally well written and beautifully illustrated, and in that sense, this volume promises well for the remaining five. However, as the critical remarks made in the above have shown, some of the contributions also leave room for discussion and disagreement—as well as, of course, further research. With this review I hope to have pointed out some interesting avenues for future work.

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