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The intonation of Danes speaking English

Contrastive analysis of Danish and English intonation is in its
infancy. Assessment of foreign accent when Danes speak English
has led to subjective labelling, according to which narrow
voice span and monotonous intonation are judged as as indica-
tors of hesitancy, apathy and sombre Scandinavian gloom. Is this
mother tongue interference or underdog interlanguage? Text-
books on the two languages are relatively unhelpful, in that
the same prosodic features (eg pitch movement up or down,
isochrony) are held to operate in each language, often in tan-
dem with the same grammatical features. On the other hand it
is easy to demonstrate that the languages exploit prosody in
different ways: for instance, Danish modal particles (da, nok,
endelig, etc) often correspond to pitch movement in English.

   In order to develop more adequate theoretical and empirical
descriptions of Danish learners' needs in the realm of pro-
sody, error analysis has been undertaken of tapes of authen-
tic communication situations (interviews with "natives"), and
where prosodic features can be studied in conjunction with
other linguistic levels - particularly phonetic and syntactic -
and with discourse functions. The research is being done within
the framework of 'Projekt i fejlanalyse, intersprogsstudier og
kontrastiv lingvistik' ("PIF") at the English Department,
Copenhagen University, which has assembled a large, represen-
tative corpus of the written and spoken English of Danes
in formal education in the Copenhagen area. In the pilot
phase of the project, error identification was carried out on
two fronts, general impressions (of pitch, modulation, varia-
tion, rhythm and tempo) and isolated prosody errors, for which
there are twenty categories, some of which however are only
relevant when the informant is reading a text aloud. Among
the tricky issues are choice of the model (only standard
British English?), error as a matter of degree, analyst relia-
bility, and the weighting of factors which contribute to Danish
accent.