Approximative *mere eller mindre* (‘more or less’) in Argentine Danish

A case of frequential and combinatorial copying

Jan Heegård Petersen

‘Danish Voices in the Americas’
janhp@hum.ku.dk
We hear *mere eller mindre*: ‘more or less all the time’-ish ...

- ... *da min kone mere eller mindre lærte at tale dansk*.
- ‘... when my wife more or less learnt to speak Danish.’

- *Man kan sove i_en_dag mere eller mindre*.
- ‘You can sleep a_whole_day more or less’.

- A: ‘Were you there all the time.’
- B: *Ja, mere eller mindre*.
- B.: ‘Yes, more or less.’
Influence from Spanish *más o menos*

- Same approximative meaning, of parts and of whole phrase
- Phonetic similarity: 2 x [m], similar stress pattern

- So: Frequential copying?
  - copying of a **frequential distribution** of a certain element from a source language to a target language, with the consequence that **the borrowed element appears more frequently** than would be expected in the target language (Johanson 2002, 2008).
  - except that the element isn’t borrowed, but partly shared expression
Purpose

(A) Actual use and distribution of *mere eller mindre* in Argentine Danish

(B) Hypothesis
   (A) A case of frequential copying
   (B) Also a case of *combinatorial copying*

(C) Principles of comparison: What may serve as a baseline language (or baseline usage)?
Agenda

• Background: Argentine Danish and its speakers
• The question of baseline
• *Mere eller mindre*'s basic meaning in Danish
• Analytical procedure
• Preliminary results
• Perspectives
Argentine Danish and its speakers

Eldorado, Misiones
small settlement
13 speakers remaining in 2014
small and dense network

Buenos Aires
enormous city
Danish church, Danish clubs, but not so dense networks
cia. 25 remaining speakers in 2014–2015

The ‘Dane Triangle’
dense networks, Danish clubs
many speakers, ca. 120 recorded in 2014–2015; 1500 speakers?
Older or dialectal Danish features in Arg. Dan.

• Lexicon, Older Danish:
  • *tornyster* not *rygsæk* 'rucksack', *isskab* not *køleskab* 'fridge', etc.

• Pronunciation, Older and dialectal Danish:
  • *arbæj* for *arbejde* 'work'

• Phonetics, dialectal Danish
  • Phonetics: [ˈfjoːdn] for [fjoɛdn] ‘14’, etc.
Clear Spanish features in Argentine Danish

• Lexicon:

\[ \text{Der lærte jeg at spise } \text{peludo.} \quad \text{(= 'hairy armadillo')} \]

‘There learnt I to eat peludo.’

• Syntax, word order:

\[ \text{Og det fik vi } \text{før ikke.} \quad \text{for .. ikke før ..} \]

‘And that got we before not.’ \quad \text{(= ‘and that we didn’t have before’)}

• Syntax, null-subject:

\[ \text{Han var i Mendoza, og da [Ø] kom tilbage, så ...} \]

‘He was in Mendoza and when [Ø] came back, then ...’
Mixed features

• Morphological blends:
  • camp-en for landet, jorden ‘the country(side), the soil’ (Sp. campo)
  • conect-ere for forbinde ‘connect’ (Sp. conectar)

• Equivalent or ‘shared’ expressions:
  • mere eller mindre Sp. más o menos

• Shared elements, chance of ‘over-generalization’, or ‘over-stabilization’?
Baseline for Argentine Danish

Time of emigration (1849-1930)

Now

Dialect ↔ St. Dan.

Dialect ↔ St. Dan.

Argentine Spanish

Dialect ↔ St. Dan.

Standard Dan.
On safe and not so safe grounds

• Older and dialectal Danish lexicon, pronunciation and grammar
  • → Very good idea about baseline

• Spanish and Argentine Spanish lexicon, phonetics and grammar:
  • Very good idea about influencing language

• But: “frequentential copying”, and “combinatorial copying”
  ← knowledge about frequency and distributional patterns
  • No descriptions of **usage** in Older and Dialectal Danish (but 1 mio. word corpus)
  • Cardona (2016): **más o menos** in Castilian Spanish; corpus of Argentine Spanish?
**mere eller mindre**: An approximative adverb

**The Danish Dictionary (1950-)**: ‘in an approximate or changing way; to some degree’

**The Dictionary of the Danish Language (1770-1950)**
‘as an expression of changing (relative) or uneven (different) degree’

som adv: mer(e) eller mindre, ogs. mer(e) og mindre, som udtryk for skiftende (relativ) ell. uens (forskellig) grad. Skuespillerinderne . . gjøre en Kompliment for Publikum og ihinanden, blive mere og mindre applauderede, eftersom de ere yndede og beundrede til. Oehl. Er. III. 128. han har skrevet en række mer(e) eller mindre underholdende bøger | det gør vi alle, mer eller mindre | jf. bet. 2: i Betragtning af, at man egentlig vedbliver at lære endog sit eget Sprog, saalænge man lever, er det ikke underligt, om en Oversætter ikke er tilstrækkelig fortrolig med det fremmede. Et Mer-eller-Mindre gives der dog. Roos. HK. 33.
Creating a world of approximative adverbs
In a selected world of approximative adverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Argentine Danish (CoSAmDa; n=653.340)</th>
<th>Dialectal Danish (Cordiale; n=1.027.000)</th>
<th>Modern Danish (LANCHART; n=9.281.051)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cirka</strong></td>
<td>‘roughly’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>godt og vel</strong></td>
<td>”good and well”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mere eller mindre</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>næsten</strong></td>
<td>‘almost’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>omkring (ved)</strong></td>
<td>‘around (about)’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>omtrent</strong></td>
<td>‘about, nearly’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a selected world of approximative adverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Argentine Danish (CoSAMDa; n=653.340)</th>
<th>Dialectal Danish (Cordiale; n=1.027.000)</th>
<th>Modern Danish (LANCHART; n=9.281.051)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cirka</strong></td>
<td>'roughly'</td>
<td>32 (6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>godt og vel</strong></td>
<td>&quot;good and well&quot;</td>
<td>3 (0.6%)</td>
<td>4 (0.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mere eller mindre</strong></td>
<td><strong>103 (19.4%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 (0.5%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>236 (4.4%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>næsten</strong></td>
<td>'almost'</td>
<td>342 (64.5%)</td>
<td>405 (74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>omkring (ved)</strong></td>
<td>&quot;around (about)&quot;</td>
<td>46 (8.7%)</td>
<td>70 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>omtrent</strong></td>
<td>'about, nearly'</td>
<td>4 (0.7%)</td>
<td>65 (11.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>530 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>547 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,251 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ *Mere eller mindre* more frequent in Argentine Danish than in other two corpora
→ At the expense of
  
  *cirka og næsten* (St. Dan.)
  *næsten* and *omtrent* (dial. Dan.)
Annotation principles

A. **Sentence type**: In short reply and in clause with Sbj and Vb

B. **Type of modification**:
   - Phrase: NP, VP, AdjP, AdvP
   - Constituent: Subj, Obj, Vb, Adv, ..
   - Whole clause or not
   - Phrase semantics (time, amount, number, ..)
**Mere eller mindre** in short replies

Shared usage pattern:

DK Dan.: Øh, sådan *mere eller mindre* i Holstebro.

‘Eh, well more or less in Holstebro.’

Arg. Dan.: *Ha!, ja mere eller mindre ha!*

‘Ha!, yes more or less, ha!’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Argentine Danish</th>
<th>Modern Danish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In short replies</strong></td>
<td>16 (16.3%)</td>
<td>10 (4.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In full clause</strong></td>
<td>82 (83.7%)</td>
<td>217 (95.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>98 (100%)</td>
<td>227 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square: p=0.0002

→ Why do Argentine Danish speakers prefer *mere eller mindre* in short replies more than DK Danish speakers?
Within clause – shared syntactic pattern

- **Manner AdvP**
  - *Med os andre snakkede han mere eller mindre almindeligt.*
  - ‘With us others talked he more or less normally.’

- **VP:**
  - *... da min kone mere eller mindre lærte at tale dansk.*
  - ‘... when my wife more or less learnt to speak Danish.’

- **Subject Predicative, NP:**
  - *For de var mere eller mindre samme alder.*
  - ‘Because they were more or less same age.’
Right-dislocation – Shared usage

• *Sådan har alle børn jo været, mere eller mindre.*
  • ‘So have all children MOD.PTCL been, more or less.’

• *Hun har ikke_nogen danske i familien, mere eller mindre.*
  • ‘She has noone Danish in the_family, more or less.’
Syntactic restrictions; most frequent functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Argentine Danish</th>
<th>Modern Danish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modifying AdjP</td>
<td>2 (3.4%)</td>
<td>41 (21.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifying AdvP</td>
<td>17 (28.8%)</td>
<td>27 (25.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifying NP</td>
<td>10 (16.9%)</td>
<td>39 (22.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-dislocated</td>
<td>30 (50.8%)</td>
<td>63 (37.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59 (100%)</td>
<td>170 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ Why do Argentine Danish speakers *disprefer* *mere eller mindre* as *modification of an AdjP*?  
→ Why are Argentine Danish speakers *more fond of* *mere eller mindre* as *right-dislocated* comment to clause?
Semantic restriction: Shared structure?

**Period:** *De var deroppe en ti dage mere eller mindre.* (Arg. Dan.)

‘They were up there a ten days more or less.’

**Amount:** *Vi havde de der 800 hektarer mere eller mindre.* (Arg. Dan.)

‘We had those 800 hectares more or less.’

**Activity:** *... da min kone mere eller mindre lærte at tale.*

‘... when my wife more or less learnt to speak Danish.’

3/5 with fixed expressions: ‘to the same degree’ ‘in an ADJ degree’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Argentine Danish</th>
<th>Danish Danish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measurable content</strong></td>
<td>32 (39%)</td>
<td>5 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not measurable content</strong></td>
<td>50 (61%)</td>
<td>202 (97.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>82 (100%)</td>
<td>207 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ Why so few in DK Dan.? (Or so many in Arg. Dan.?)
→ Interaction with syntax (right-dislocated)?
Summary

• A sense of “too much” mere eller mindre, due to influence from Arg. Spanish

• Good baseline for comparison for other contact phenomena, but not for mere eller mindre

• Mere eller mindre more frequent in Arg. Dan. in ‘world of approximatives’ (cf. ‘Frequentational copying’)

• More mere eller mindre:
  • (a) short replies and (b) right-dislocation, (towards ‘Combinatorial copying’)
  • (c) measurable content

• Fewer mere eller mindre:
  • With adjectives
Summary

• A sense of “too much” mere eller mindre, due to influence from Arg. Spanish
• Solid baseline for comparison for other contact phenomena, but not for mere eller mindre
• Mere eller mindre more frequent in Arg. Dan. in ‘world of approximatives’ (cf. ‘Frequential copying’)
• More mere eller mindre:
  • (a) short replies and (b) right-dislocation, (towards ‘Combinatorial copying’?)
  • (c) measurable content
• Fewer mere eller mindre:
  • With adjectives

In line (?) with Spanish más o menos (Cardona 2016), expresses: “modesty” “evasive answers” “semantic-pragmatic down-toning”

Not dominating for Spanish más o menos (Cardona 2016: 386):

Not at all in line with Spanish or DK Dan.
Concluding perspectives

• Yes, Frequential Copying; + Combinatorial Copying (Johanson 2002, 2008) (‘pragmatic’ usage or usage domains)

• But also ‘own life’ (less with adjectives, more with measurable content)? – needs more analysis

• Requires solid corpora for specific language varieties for establishing usage patterns, if no solid corpora then ...

• Mitigating functions also in general extenders and hedges, but these ‘worlds’ ...

• → Deciphering aspects of Frequential and Combinatorial Copying more or less challenging because of mere eller mindre’s pragmatic element
Tak – Gracias – Thanks

A.P. MØLLER FONDEN

CARLSBERG FOUNDATION
References

• Gregersen, Frans & Tore Kristiansen. 2015. Indledning. Sprogforandring i virkelig tid [Introduction. Language change in real time]. Frans Gregersen & Tore Kristiansen (red.), *Hvad ved vi nu – om danske talesprog?* [What do we know now – about spoken Danish?]. København: Sprogforandringscentret, Københavns Universitet. 9–45.
• Hansen, N. 2016. *En snert af dansk mellem urskov og pampa* [A touch of Danish between jungle and pampa]. The Danish element in to Danish colonies in Argentina]. (Ed. by J. Heegård & K. Kühl). Online.
• Heegård, J. & K. Kühl (subm.). *Argentinadansk: Semantiske, syntaktiske og morfologiske forskelle til rigsdansk* [Argentine Danish: Semantic, syntactic and morphological differences with respect to Standard Danish].
• Kühl, K., J. Heegård, G.F. Hansen & F. Gregersen (subm.). CoAmDA. Et nyt dansk talesprogskorpus [CoAmDa. A new Danish spoken language corpus].
In a selected world of approximative adverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Argentine Danish (CoSAMDa; n=653,340)</th>
<th>Dialectal Danish (Cordiale; n=1,027,000)</th>
<th>Modern Danish (LANCHART; n=9,281,051)</th>
<th>North America Danish (CoNAMDa; n=600,688)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cirka</strong></td>
<td>‘roughly’</td>
<td>32 (6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>868 (16.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>godt og vel</strong></td>
<td>“good and well”</td>
<td>3 (0.6%)</td>
<td>4 (0.7%)</td>
<td>26 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mere eller mindre</strong></td>
<td>103 (19.4%)</td>
<td>3 (0.5%)</td>
<td>236 (4.4%)</td>
<td>7 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>næsten</strong></td>
<td>‘almost’</td>
<td>342 (64.5%)</td>
<td>405 (74%)</td>
<td>3,691 (70.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>omkring (ved)</strong></td>
<td>‘around (about)’</td>
<td>36 (6.8%)</td>
<td>50 (9.1%)</td>
<td>383 (7.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>omtrent</strong></td>
<td>‘about, nearly’</td>
<td>4 (0.7%)</td>
<td>65 (11.9%)</td>
<td>43 (0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>530 (100%)</td>
<td>547 (100%)</td>
<td>5,251 (100%)</td>
<td>424 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>