



Københavns Universitet



"Copenhagen is a stressful place": establishing the local viewpoint through the experience of otherness

Hovmark, Henrik

Publication date:
2018

Document version
Peer-review version

Citation for published version (APA):
Hovmark, H. (2018). "Copenhagen is a stressful place": establishing the local viewpoint through the experience of otherness.

Henrik Hovmark

"Copenhagen is a stressful place": establishing the local viewpoint through the experience of otherness

Sociolinguistics Symposium 22, Auckland, New Zealand, June 29.

Cognitive Sociolinguistics. Language and place.

Abstract.

In 2015-16 28 15-year old pupils from a dialect-speaking area in Southern Jutland in Denmark were subject to individual semi-structured sociolinguistic interviews, and each pupil's amount of traditional dialect features was extracted. During both interviews the pupils were encouraged to describe their impressions from a recent, 4-day long excursion to the capital of Copenhagen. The conversations yielded a number of answers in which Copenhagen was described as an "unusual", "noisy", "stressful" place with "big buildings" and "many cars", sometimes explicitly combined with descriptions of the home village as a more "relaxing" place. Thus, the pupils apparently reproduced the stereotypical dichotomy: 'urban vs. rural'.

In this presentation we discuss these conceptualizations and how to interpret them, drawing on approaches from two neighboring but hitherto less well connected disciplines: cognitive sociolinguistics and cultural geography. We suggest that insights from both disciplines might be fruitfully combined in the interpretation of the data.

A strong phenomenological tradition within cultural geography would relate the pupils' representations of bodily sensations ("noisy", "big", "many") to the concept of "belonging" and interpret them as feelings of "un-belonging" or being "out-of-place" (Tuan 1974; cf. Antonsich 2010, Thissen 2013). Cognitive sociolinguistics (and cultural anthropology) would highlight the role of social stereotypes and/or cultural models (Kristiansen 2008, Kronenfeld 2008) and relate the individuals' way of conceptualizing, interpreting and retelling their experiences to more overarching social stereotypes, local or more general: "Southern Jutland is a quiet, countryside outskirts", "metropolises are noisy, big, and crowded"), and to in-group constructions of shared experiences.

First, we consider the answers as a whole, establishing the main clusters of conceptualizations, and we show that the image of the metropole as an unusual and potentially dangerous place generally prevails. Next, however, we look at individual informants and profiles, and show, for instance, that a large number of dialect features do not necessarily correlate with a predominantly "negative" conceptualization of Copenhagen. We argue that the meeting with and conceptualization of otherness are indirectly reflecting and creating the local viewpoint, however through a complex social work in which individual differences and differentiated social conditions and background play a significant role.