



## How did 'man' become 'du', or did it?

Jensen, Torben Juel; Gregersen, Frans

*Publication date:*  
2012

*Document version*  
Early version, also known as pre-print

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Jensen, T. J., & Gregersen, F. (2012). *How did 'man' become 'du', or did it? The sociolinguistics of generic pronoun variation in modern spoken Danish*. Abstract from Sociolinguistics Symposium, Berlin, Germany.

## How did 'man' become 'du', or did it?

### The sociolinguistics of generic pronoun variation in modern spoken Danish

Torben Juel Jensen & Frans Gregersen (University of Copenhagen)

In modern Danish, the most frequently used pronoun for generic reference is *man*, developed from the noun *man(d)* ( $\approx$  English *man*). Recently, though, the second person singular pronoun *du* has gained ground, in parallel to similar recent developments in other languages (e.g. Laberge & Sankoff 1980; Kitagawa & Lehrer 1990).

A large scale study based on transcribed recordings of 370 conversations with 260 different speakers from four different geographical locations in Denmark, three different age cohorts and three different points in time, 1970-71, the 1980ies and 2005-10, documents a rise in the use of generic *du* during that period, but also that the use of *du* has presumably peaked and is now decreasing or stabilizing at a lower level (Jensen 2009). The study also reveals that although there is no difference between generic *du* and *man* with respect to propositional meaning, there are important differences in their interpersonal potentials (Beck Nielsen, Fogtman & Jensen 2009). The study is part of the LANCHART project on language change in 20th century Danish ([www.lanchart.dk](http://www.lanchart.dk)).

This paper focuses on intra-individual and intra-conversational variation within the LANCHART corpus. Individual speakers vary considerably with respect to the use of *du* (in comparison with *man*) within the same recording according to which discourse context they participate in. In order to explain the variation of generic *du* all passages in the recordings have been coded according to macro speech act, activity type, type of interaction and genre as well as enunciation (Gregersen, Beck Nielsen & Thøgersen 2009, Gregersen & Barner-Rasmussen 2011, LANCHART 2011). The results of a statistical analysis using mixed models show a number of correlations as to the use of generic *du*, and by and large support the claim that generic *du* is used as a resource for construing involvement. These quantitative results make up the point of departure for corroborating qualitative analyses of discourse contexts and the use of generic pronouns.

#### References:

- Beck Nielsen, S., Fogtman, C. & Jensen, T.J. (2009). From community to conversation – and back. Exploring the interpersonal potentials of two generic pronouns in Danish, *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 41: 116-142.
- Gregersen, F, Beck Nielsen, S & Thøgersen, J (2009). Stepping into the same river twice: on the discourse context analysis in the LANCHART project, *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 41: 30-63.
- Gregersen, F. & Barner-Rasmussen, M. (2011). The logic of comparability. On genres and phonetic variation in a project on language change in real time. *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory* 7/1: 7-36.
- Jensen, T.J. (2009). Generic variation? Developments in the use of generic pronouns in late 20th century spoken Danish, *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 41: 83-115.
- Kitagawa, C. & A. Lehrer (1990). Impersonal uses of personal pronouns, *Journal of Pragmatics* 14: 739-759.
- Laberge, S. & G. Sankoff (1980). Anything you can do, in Sankoff, Gillian (ed.) *The social life of language*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 271-293.