

## Language Works 7(1)

Welcome to the 12<sup>th</sup> issue of Language Works.

After two years (has it really "only" been two years?) in the shadow of Covid, we are now back to studies and research as we know it. This also means a new issue of Language Works, which this time around is bursting at the seams with a total of five articles that span across the broad field of linguistics.

Welcome, and happy reading!

### The articles in this issue

Among the Germanic languages, Danish and English are characterized by a relatively simple case morphology while e.g. German and Icelandic have maintained larger parts of the old Germanic case system, including accusative, dative and genitive. In her article, Anna-Merete Thinggaard asks which processes led to Danish and English losing case distinctions during the Middle Ages while German did not. Thinggaard presents two possible explanations: One based on (lacking) phonological distinction between the different cases, and one structural explanation based on whether case alone carries syntactic information, or whether case functions only as a kind of ancillary marking. Thinggaard discusses pros and cons of the two interpretations based on examples from Danish and English.

Peter Katballe-Kristensen also compares Danish and English in his analysis of a grammatical phenomenon, and once again the topic is related to the morphology of noun phrases. In this case, the question is how to analyze the possessive marker *-s* in Danish and English. In both Danish and English, possessive is marked with relation to the entire noun phrase and not solely the noun. Speakers prefer "the man on the corner's car" rather than "the man's on the corner car". This raises the question whether to analyze *-s* as a genitive marking or as a sort of determiner related to the following noun phrase (in this case "car"). Katballe-Kristensen discusses the two analyses and also considers the Western Jutlandic possessive marker *si*.

Anne-Sofie Pade Hansen investigates the two Russian prepositions *do* and *po* in light of grammaticalization theory, and asks whether the two prepositions have (variants containing) lexical meaning, or whether they only express grammatical meaning – whether they are grammaticalized in fixed phrases in other words. A classic example of this type of grammaticalization is English *going to*, which can express movement, as in: "I am going to Glasgow", or solely grammatical meaning (typically future), as in: "She is going to sleep". Based on defining criteria and queries in The Russian National Corpus, Hansen finds both lexical and grammatical meaning variants of *do* and *po*. Especially *po* is characterized by a high degree of grammaticalization.

Grammatical categories are not only interesting for understanding language as a system and as a means of communication. Grammatical categories can also be closely related to questions of identity. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the question of gendered and gender-neutral personal pronouns. Clara Hein Damgaard describes the occurrence of the gender neutral, singular, “they” in modern English with a particular focus on the personal and societal meanings that pronouns give rise to. The analysis is based on interviews with self-declared non-binary Americans, and it investigates both their own (often very emotional) understandings of the use of “they”, as well as their understanding of the social changes which the pronoun symbolizes. The analysis is couched in the theory of “verbal hygiene”, a focus on language use and linguistic change that stresses social struggle and ascription of value as well as metalinguistic debates.

In the last article of this issue, Tanja Bonde Pedersen analyzes narratives used as accounts. We can understand *narratives* as chronologically structured retellings of personal experiences, and *accounts* as explanations of why one acted in a way that violated social norms. Pedersen shows how two friends each use their own narrative presentation of an event they both participated in – an event which gave rise to disagreement between them. By their use of narratives, they explain their own perspective on the events, account for their actions and negotiate a mutual understanding of their own and their friend’s actions. Pedersen further argues that accounts for norm violating actions are themselves part of a larger more personal and relational narrative about “who I am” and “what our relationship is”.

### **Your article in the next issue?**

Do you have a good idea or a project that could interest others? As a student, you may have an essay that could be turned into an article. As a teacher, you may have supervised or assessed an essay that you think could become a good article. Or perhaps you have participated in a conference, workshop, seminar, or course that could be the basis for a thematic section/special issue of Language Works?

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