“Dear me, we’re in trouble because the sign has split up in two.” On the pronunciation and function of the Danish adverb altså

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In Danish dictionaries, the word altså ‘thus, then, obviously, therefore’ is presented as a single lexeme with a large degree of polysemy. Altså has an adverbial and an interjectional usage, and both of these have several sub-meanings. In the DanPass corpus of contemporary spoken Danish, altså’s pronunciation is rendered as very distinct [ˈaltsɒ] to strongly reduced [a]. In this article, we suggest a measure for phonetic reduction, an ‘expansion hierarchy’, and we investigate whether the variation in the pronunciation of altså correlates with its syntactic function. The results a grouping of the manifestations of altså’s in two clusters, a clause-external, and a clause-internal. The clause-external use is interjectional, and its correlating pronunciations are clearly reduced, i.e., consisting of few segments. The clause-internal use encompasses sentence adverbs and modal particles (Da. dialogiske partikler), and its correlating pronunciations are clearly expanded, i.e., consisting of more phonetic segments. Thus, taking the grammatical status into consideration, the pragmatic function and the actual pronunciation of altså, this article suggests that Modern Standard Danish has two words that are spelled altså.

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