

# Phonetic variation as social practice

illustrated by new developments in young Copenhagen speech

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The theoretical basis for the paper is a practice perspective on phonetic variation. The approach is a combination of variationism, ethnography and social psychology. The data for the study are based on seven months of participant observation in a large urban school, 'The City School' and recordings of 64 interviews with pupils.

The ethnographic fieldwork focuses on the important socially meaningful categories and practices among the pupils. Especially categories regarding gender and ethnicity turn out to be important in the construction of social order in the school. Through analyses of social practices I delimit eight different style clusters which most of the pupils can be said to draw on in their persona construction.

The linguistic analysis concentrates on ten phonetic variables. Analysis shows that pupils belonging to the categories labelled 'foreign girls' and 'foreign boys' most frequently use the 'advanced' variants. However, they use different variants, i.e. the variants which have high frequency in one category have a low frequency in the other.

I have looked at only one part of the variation in modern Copenhagen speech. So far we do not know which features are expanding in use, and which are not. However, it seems that the classical assumption that changes in Copenhagen speech spread from lower socio-economic levels of society is not confirmed, since gender and ethnicity seem to be more important in language variation than socio-economic conditions in late modern society.