

One long vowel

On the consonant-vowel ratio in Danish

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ABSTRACT

The Danish language is often described as extremely rich in vowel sounds. ‘Sloppy’ articulation is said to turn consonants into vowels or skip them entirely, turning spoken Danish into practically one long vowel sequence with up to 40 different vowel sounds and almost no consonants. This vowel-heavy nature of Danish is often used as a key argument in depictions of Danish as a peculiar language that is particularly hard to acquire for both Danish children and second language learners. This paper discusses the validity of this portrayal of Danish by examining the consonant-vowel ratio of the language from both a paradigmatic and syntagmatic point of view. Furthermore, the effect of phonetic reduction and change on the consonant-vowel ratio is examined. Based on the findings, the paper argues for a more nuanced depiction of Danish phonetics and phonology.

KEYWORDS: phonetics; phonology; Danish, language change; phonetic reduction