

## Pancake sentences and gender system changes in Mainland Scandinavian

Two different phenomena, involving gender in Mainland Scandinavian are the possibility of using “pancake sentences”, and the semantification of formal gender in Danish, in particular West Jutlandic. I argue that the phenomena are intimately connected.

Pancake sentences are characterized by neuter agreement on the predicative adjective, although there is no apparent source for such agreement. As shown in (1), the subject of pancake sentences has a SUBSTANCE or a STATE reading.

There are indications that the subject of pancake sentences is larger than what we see, and that the subject is headed by a null classifier, neuter, but crucially devoid of number. This element would presumably be an instantiation of Pelletier’s Universal Grinder (Pelletier 1979). Such an analysis would account for the agreement pattern and the reading of the subject. As (2) shows, the classifier may take different complements, usually NP, vP, and SC, the latter with a null generic HAVE as the predicate.

According to Wellander (1949, 184) the pancake construction was introduced quite recently in Swedish, around 1900. The construction type is older in Danish (Malmgren 1990, 115).

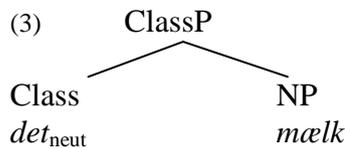
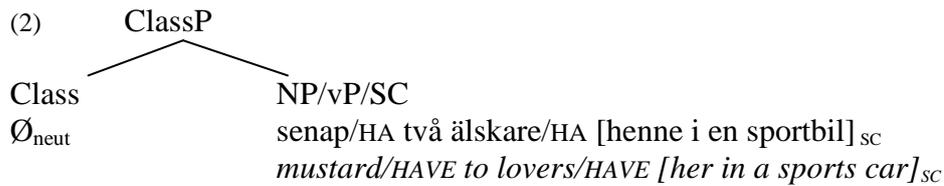
The gender system of West Jutlandic differs from the rest of Mainland Scandinavian in being consistently semantic; with a SUBSTANCE/MASS/EVENT reading, nouns are assigned neuter, and with a countable reading common gender. When a SUBSTANCE/MASS/EVENT reading is intended, the noun is obligatorily preceded by a neuter element, primarily *det* (it.neuter), viz. *det mælk* ‘milk’, see (3). I argue that this *det* and the like are classifiers, in all relevant respects identical to the proposed null classifiers heading the subjects of pancake sentences.

The described phenomena are due to changes that started around 1000AD in the phonology of West Jutlandic, with a subsequent transformation of the gender system (Skautrup 1968, part IV, 127ff). This includes a reanalysis of *det* as a classifier. According to Arboe (2009), the semantic gender system of West Jutlandic now influences standard Danish, with an increased use of a neuter *det* preceding substance nouns; according to the proposed analysis this *det* would be a classifier. According to Hansen & Heltoft (2011, part 2, paragr. 5.4), a semantically motivated use of common gender *den* and neuter *det*, regardless of the formal gender of the antecedent noun, spreads in Danish.

In Danish, the changes seems to be more far-reaching than in Swedish, where the main consequence seems to be the possibility of using pancake sentences; however, although other changes in the gender system can be discerned too.

(1) Three types of pancake sentences:

- a Senap är gul-t.  
*mustard is yellow-neut*  
 'Mustard is yellow.' senap ~ substance
- b Två älskare är omoralisk-t.  
*two lovers is immoral-neut*  
 'To have two lovers is immoral-neut.' TO HAVE två älskare ~ state
- c Henne i en sportbil vore trevlig-t.  
*her in a sports.car would.be nice-neut*  
 'To have her in a sports car would be nice.' TO HAVE [her in a sports car]<sub>sc</sub> ~ state



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