

Danish Pronunciation

Luciano Canepari – © 2017

1. Neutral Danish (Germ., IE) has changed considerably with respect to the traditional pronunciation of three or four decades ago, both phonetically and phonemically (even though grammars and textbooks usually still present traditional pronunciation).

In fact, we now even find an opposition between /æ/ ≠ /a/, as in *kan* /'khæ/ [k'hæ] (present tense) 'can' vs *kar* /'kha/ [k'ha] 'container', *Anners* /'ænʌs/ [ʔænʌs] (genitive plural form of) 'Anna' vs *Anders* /'anʌs/ [ʔanʌs] (surname).

In words of foreign origin ending in *-a#*, we have /æ#/ [ʌ], but /a#/ [a] for *-ra*: *villa* /'vilæ/ [v'ila], *Noah* /'nʊʊæ/ [n'ʊʊʌ], *zebra* [ʂɪpɾɛʌ], *Nora* [n'ʊʊʌʌ, n'ʊʊʌ].

Moreover, we now have: *lad* /'læð/ [l'æɔ] (before coronal C) vs *lab*, *laf*, *lak* /'lap, 'laf, 'lak/ [lap, 'laf, 'lak], which once had the same phoneme (/CaC/), even though phonetic differences similar to those of today were to be found (ie: [l'æɔ], [lap, 'laf, 'lak]), while there were no minimal pairs, since *kar* was still /'khar/ [k'hax, k'hax] (the last symbol is completely voiceless), and *kan* /'kha(nʔ)/ [k'hæ(n)].

Besides, it is better to posit the phonemes /ɔ(ɔ)/, even if they are only found in contact with /r/. In fact, particularly out of sociolinguistic reasons, we cannot let /rɔ(ɔ)/ [rɔ(ɔ)] coincide with the diaphonemic sequences /rø(ø)/ [rø(ø)], which are possible in the same words, but with connotations referring to traditional pronunciation (which is shown by the taxophones given in the second vocogram), with a closing and fronting narrow diphthong; the same happens for the indicated taxophone of /re(e)/ [re(e)].

2. Let us also notice /eɛ, øɔ/, which occur in contact with /r, ʀ/: they are *diaphonemes*, being possibly realized as [ee, øø; øø, øø] alongside with [eɛ, øɔ]: *lære* /'leɛr/ [l'eɛʌ, l'eɛʌ, l'øʌ], *smøre* /'smøɔr/ [ʂmøɔʌ, ʂmøøʌ, ʂmøɔʌ], *rærene* /'reɛʔr-nə/ [r'eɛʔʌnə, r'eøʔʌnə, r'øʔʌnə, -ʔʌ], *røre* /'røɔr/ [r'øɔʌ, r'øøʌ, r'øɔʌ].

Again in the second vocogram, we also find the peculiar realizations of /re, rø/ [rɛʌ, røʌ], with an inserted approximant, as in: *række* /'rɛkə/ [r'ɛʌkə], *dromme* /'trømə/ [r'ɛʌømə, -øm].

Even other taxophones appear, under the influence of /r/ and of /ʀ/ [ʌ, ʌ#], as well, but we focus especially on /aar, ɔɔr/ ('/aaa, ɔɔr') [aʌ, ɔʌ], as in *vare* /'vaar/ [v'aʌ, v'aʌ], *pore* /'phɔɔr/ [p'hɔʌ, p'hɔɔʌ]; the second taxophones are increasingly less frequent (and belong more to traditional pronunciation).

The series is completed by /ir, ir, er, yr, yr, or, ur, ur/ [i-, i-, e-; y-, y-, ø-; u-, u-], which maintain the second element unassimilated, ie /r/ [ʌ] and [ʌ#], if final and prepausal. Sequences of /VV/ + /ʀ/ are also possible: *ord* /'ʊʊʔr/. Stressed initial vowels are often preceded by [ʔ].

/i(i)/ [i(i)], /y(y)/ [y(y)]		/u(u)/ [μ(μ)]
/ɪ(ɪ)/ [ɪ(ɪ)], /ʏ(ʏ)/ [ʏ(ʏ)]		/ʊ(ʊ)/ [ʊ(ʊ)]
/e(e)/ [e(e)], /ø(ø)/ [ø(ø)]		/ə/ [ə]
/ɛɛ/ [ɛɛ], /ɞ(ɞ)/ [ɞ(ɞ)]		/o(o)/ [o(o)]
/æ/ [ɛ, ↓ɛ]		/ɔ(ɔ)/ [σ(σ)], /C _R / [C _Λ , C _Λ [#]]
/a/ [a] ([↓A] + lab. & apic. C)		/ə/ [ə, Δ, Λ]
		/aa/ [aa]

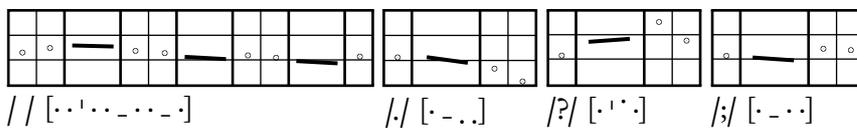
/i, ɪ/+/ð/ [i, ɪ]+[ɹ]		/R(u)u/ [ɹu(u)]
/y, ʏ/+/ð/ [ɥ, ʊ]+[ɹ]		/Rø(ø)/ [ɹø(ø)]
/re(e)/ [ɹe(e)]		/øɞ/+/R/ [øɞ]
/eɛ/+/R/ [ɛɛ]		/Rɞ/ [ɹɞ]
/rɛ/ [ɹɛ]		/ə/ [ɹ, ɔ, ɥ]
/εɛ/+/R/ [ɛɛ], /ε(ε)R/ [ɛ(ε)R]		
/ræ#/ [Λ], /ræ#/ [(ɹ)a]		

/ii/ [ii]		/uy(ə)/ [μy(ə)]
/ei/ [ei]		/yɥ/ [ɥy]
/ei/ [ɛi]		
/ai(ə)/ [Λe(ə), ↓aə(ə), ↓↓aə(ə)]		/Δy(ə)/ [Δy(ə)]

/iu/ [iμ]		/yu/ [yμ]
/iu/ [ɪμ]		/yɥ/ [ɥμ]
/eu/ [eμ]		/øu/ [øμ]
/eu/ [ɛμ]		/ou/ [oμ]
		/ɔu/ [ɔμ]
/au/ [aμ]		/Δu/ [Δμ]

/i _R / [i _ɹ], /y _R / [y _ɹ]		/u _R / [μ _ɹ]
/ɪ _R / [ɪ _ɹ], /ʏ _R / [ʏ _ɹ]		/ʊ _R / [ʊ _ɹ]
/ε _R / [ɛ _Λ], /œ _R / [ɞ _Λ]		
/aa/+/R/ = 'aaa' [a _ɹ a]		/ɔɔ/+/R/ = 'ɔɔɔ' [ɔ _ɹ ɔ]

m	n	[ŋ]	[ŋ]	ŋ
p(h)	t(h)	[t(h)]	[k(h)]	k(h)
f v	ɸ	ʃ [ʃ]		
	ɹ	[ɹ]	j	[ɥ] [ʊ] ɹ h [h]
	l	[l]		



3. /i, ɪ, y, ʏ/ + /ð/ have retracted taxophones [i̠, ɪ̠, ʏ̠, ʊ̠], which are indicated: *stød* /'styð/ [ʃt̪ø̠]. Danish shows various sequences of vowel phonemes (either short or long, [V, VV]), phonetically real closing diphthongs, with /i/ [i̠], or especially /u/ [u̠], as a second element (deriving from previous /ɣ, v/, to which they are still synchronically linked). Notice, however, that /ai/ is mostly [æ, ↓aə, ↓↓aə].

There are even some real triphthongs, which are generally hardly ever realistically indicated with 'VjV, VwV', which would lead one to think there are two syllables 'V#jV, V#wV'. The third to fifth vocograms show all these.

Sequences of /VV/ + /i, u/ are also possible: eg, *åg* /'iɪ²i, 'oo²u/, but they are often shortened to /V/ + /i, u/, especially in widely used words: /'iɪ², 'ou²/.

The abstract (tautosyllabic) sequences //ən, əl, əɾ// undergo assimilation, which is already included in our phonemic transcriptions /n̩, l̩, ɾ̩/ (the latter, [ɾ, ɾ̩#], from previous traditional [ɾ]): *halen* /'hæɛl̩/, *gammel* /'kaməɫ/ [ˈkamɫ̩], *haler* /'hæɛɫ̩/.

This assimilation can further extend to other voiced phonemes: *tiet* /'thiiəð/ [ˈtʰii̠ð̩], *hyldet* /'hyləð/ [ˈhyl̩ð̩]. Let us notice that currently (as already emerged from some examples given above) /ə#/ even assimilates to a preceding voiced phone, giving: *hale* /'hæɛl̩/, *måne* /'moonə/ [ˈmoo̠n̩], *uge* /'uuə/ [ˈʔ̩u̠], *pige* /'phiiə/ [ˈpʰii̠, ˈpʰi̠i], *pine* /'phiinə/ [ˈpʰii̠n̩], *gade* /'kæɛðə/ [ˈkæ̠e̠ð̩], which are possibly further reduced in case of complete assimilation.

Let us also notice: *uforstæelige* /ufɾ'stoo²əliə/ [ˌufɾ̩'ʃt̪oo̠li̠].

4. As for *consonants*, we recall that /C^h/ indicates /Ch, C/, which oppose word-initially; in the extant cases (even in /sC/) they occur without 'aspiration', and –between vowels– they are voiceless lenis, [p̥, t̥, k̥] (in careful pronunciation, but [b̥, d̥, ɡ̥] in connected speech).

Besides, we notice that in the capital and its outskirts, /th/ is often realized as [t̪h]: *ten* /'thiɪ²n/ [ˈt̪hi̠n̩; ˈt̪h-]; on the other hand, especially between vowels, /t/ is frequently realized as [ɹ] ('dasked *d*'): *otte* /'ootə/ [ˈʔ̩oo̠t̪ə, -d̪ə, -ɹə].

Besides, /n, t^h, s, l/ + /j/ → [n̩j, t̪(h)j, s̪(j), lj], but usually //sj// → /ʃ/ [ʃ]. In addition, in quick speech /h/ can become [ɦ] between V.

.5. As already seen, Danish has a typical consonantal sound: /ð/ [ɹ̥], 'blødt *d*' /'plyt 'tiɪ²/ [ˈplyt̪ ˈt̪i̠], a voiced lateralized dental approximant (which foreigners often mistake for /l/).

Stød is a typically Danish phenomenon by which stressed (or half-stressed) vowels either short (followed by voiced consonants) or long can present distinctively the creaky phonation type (in place of ancient tones): *hun* /'hun/ [ˈh̥u̠n] 'she', *hund* /'hun²/ [ˈh̥u̠n̩] 'dog'; also, *mor* /'mooɾ/ [ˈmoo̠ɾ] 'mother', *mord* /'moo²ɾ/ [ˈmoo̠ɾ] 'murder'; *tænder* /'thenɾ/ [ˈt̪he̠n̩ɾ] 'lighter', *tænder* /'then²ɾ/ [ˈt̪he̠n̩ɾ] 'teeth'.

Some speakers pronounce /V², C²/ as sequences of [Vɾ, Cɾ]. However, nowadays, this pronunciation is not considered to be neutral any longer, except when speaking slowly or emphatically; otherwise, it is regional.

Let us finish with some interesting transcriptions: *København* /kʰyɾn̩'hau²n/ [kʰyɾn̩'hau̠n̩], *Kierkegaard* /kʰiɾkəkəɔ²/ [ˈkʰi̠k̪ə̠k̪ə̠, -k̪ə̠k̪-, -k̪k̪-], *Lars von Trier* /'laas fən'thrii²ɾ/ [ˈlaas̪ fən'tʰri̠i̠ɾ].

6. *Spelling*. Vowels: *a* /εε, æ, a/ (but only /a, aa/ before or after *r*), *e* /ɪɪ, e; ɪ/ (after *r*, normally /ε, ee, ei/; before *r* /ε, ɪɪ/), *eg*#/ej /aɪ/, *er*(#) /ɛr/, *i* /ii, i, ɪ/, *o* /oo, o; u/ (before *g*, *v* even /oo/), *or* /ɔɔ, ɔ/, *u* /uu, u, o; u/, *y* /yy, y, ɣ/, *æ* /e, ee/ (before *r* /εε, ε/, after *r* /ee, ε/), *ø* /yɣ, ɣ, ø, øø/ (before *r* /yɣ, øø, ø/, after *r* /ø, øø, ø/; /ø, øø/ only, but not necessarily, before *m*, *n*, *v*, or after *r*), *ør* /yɣr, ør/, *øj* /ɔɣ/, *å* /oo, o, o/, *år* /ɔɔ, ɔ/, *Vv(l/n)*# /Vu(l/n)/.

Consonants: *b* /p/ (finally, even /v#, u#/), *c* /sɥ, k/, *ch* /ʃ/, *d* /#t, ð#, ðə, øði/ (silent in *ld*, *nd*, *rd*#, *ds*, *dt*), *-dd-* /ð/, *g* /#k, ɥø, ɥi#, ɥu#/, *lg* /lj/, *rg* /ru/, *-gg-* /k/, *h* /h/, *#hj* /j/, *#hv* /v/, *jV* /j/, *k* /#kh, k/, *ng* /ŋ/, *p* /#ph, p/, *r* /r, r#/ (*Vre(r)*# /V(V)r/, *Vrre(r)*# /V(r)rr/, *Cre*# /Crr/, *ere*# /rr/), *s* /s/, *t* /#th, t/, *z* /s/.

7. The fundamental *intonation* patterns are shown in the tonogram at the end of the figure.