

VÆK AF VEJEN, KONGE SKREJEN: GØTUDANSKT OR DANO-FAROESE

by
Hjalmar P. Petersen

In this article, the author discusses the term *Gøtudanskt*: how we are to understand the term, and what is characteristic of that special variety of Danish spoken on the Faroe Islands.

1. Introduction

Typical Dano-Faroese or *Gøtudanskt* is somewhat different from standard Danish. Basically, when people speak *Gøtudanskt*, they pronounce Danish as it is written, so a word like *dag* 'day' will be pronounced, mostly, with a hard -g. Other features of Faroese phonology are also found in *Gøtudanskt*.

How much Faroese interference is found in *Gøtudanskt* differs from speaker to speaker, as proficiency in Danish varies. It is not unusual for some people to have spent some time in Denmark, either because of work or study or both, etc., and some young Faroese have typically spent a year in Danish continuation schools.

Among the phonetic features to be mentioned are Faroese vowel values, and also, from time to time, voiceless *n* and *l* as in, for example, *velta* 'to culture', and pre-aspiration, as in *vakt* 'duty'. This is a matter that still needs further investigation.

In this short article, I look at the definition of *Gøtudanskt* given in Poulsen (1993), and exemplify *Gøtudanskt* with a citation from the internet, where it is apparent that Faroe Islanders in general do not have the same understanding of *Gøtudanskt* as that presented in Poulsen (1993) (although Poulsen might be on the right track with regard to the origin of the term). Finally, I provide the reader with some typical examples of *Gøtudanskt*.

The data is from the Faroese-Danish Hamburg Database on Bilingualism, the K8 Corpus. The data is based on semi-formal interviews that T. Stensbjerg made on the Faroe Islands in the summer of 2006. She spoke to 24 informants from different dialect areas and from two different age groups, the younger generation between 15-20, and the older generation, 70+. The topic was typically children's games, school, what they did in their spare time, and so on. The older generation also spoke about the war and the English occupation of the islands, and some of them spoke about haymaking, the cutting of turf, and the killing of pilot whales.

As T. Stensbjerg is a native speaker of Danish, and does not speak any Faroese, the informants had to speak Danish to her, or the variant of Danish that I call Gøtudanskt.

The data is currently being analyzed in preparation to publishing, but the preliminary findings are interesting, and we use some of them to exemplify Gøtudanskt.

2. The origin of the term Gøtudanskt

According to Poulsen (1993), Gøtudanskt goes back to a teacher from the village of Gøta. He lived from 1850 to 1930, and spoke Danish with a lot of 'Faroisms'. One example Poulsen (1993) mentions is:

- (1) De store for flesen, de kan brække traver (Gøtudanskt)
Teir stóru fyri flesini, teir kunnu bróta tráður (Faroese)
The big along skerry-the, they can break fishing rods
'The big ones [coalfish] outside the skerry can break fishing rods'
(Poulsen 1993)

The teacher spoke this kind of Danish everywhere he went, also in the capital, Tórshavn, when visiting stores and offices, and it is presumably in this way the term Gøtudanskt spread to the colloquial language.

Maybe this is so, maybe not; still, it is a good story, and it might point to the origin of the term Gøtudanskt. It is worth noting, however, that Poulsen (1993) does not accept the term Gøtudanskt, as it is understood in this article and by most Faroe Islanders: Danish spoken according to the written standard, but with Faroese interference. More specifically:

Gøtudanskt/Dano-Faroese is highly proficient (L2) Danish spoken mainly as the written Danish standard by Faroe Islanders with Faroese interference at all levels of language processing. It is characteristic of the older generation. The younger generation has a proper Danish pronunciation.

This is also how the term is understood by people in general, as the following quotation from the internet shows:

Tú hevur rætt, at enskt er gott at duga, heimsborgari, men danskt er eisini hent at duga, tá ið tú ert í Flatlondum. Tað ber eisini til at duga gøtudanskt, tí tað líkist øllum teimum norðurlendsku málunum sum danskt, norskt og svenskt. Men gott er at duga rætt danskt nú á døgum, so danir betur skilja okkum, og tað er í longndini eitt sindur vánaligt ikki at duga danskt. Gøtudanskt er líkasum ov lætt, tí tú sigur alt beint fram.

'You, World-Citizen, are also right, that it is good to know English, but it is good for us to know Danish, when we go to Denmark. It is also possible to know Gøtudanskt, because it is so like all the other Mainland Scandinavian languages, like Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. But it is good to know right Danish nowadays, because that makes it easier for the Danes to understand us, and in the long run, is it a bit of a defeat not to know Danish. Gøtudanskt is almost too easy, because you talk just like it [Danish] is written'.

(www.uf.fo/forum...019403, accessed 24.09.07)

The title of this paper is also an example of Gøtudanskt. It is a jingle that children use when sledging: *væk af vejen, konge skrejen* 'away from the road, the king is sledging', where *skrejen* comes from the Faroese verb *at skreiða* 'to sledge'.

3. Characteristics

Various Faroese phonetic features are found in classic Gøtudanskt. For example, the voiceless *n* and *l* as in *lænt* 'borrowed' and *velta* 'to culture', and pre-aspiration in for example *vakt* 'duty'. More work is needed on the vowel values and other Faroese phonetic features of Gøtudanskt. These should then be compared to Faroese and Danish proper. Other features are:

- Intra-sentential code-switching
- Inter-sentential code-switching
- Convergence
- Nonce borrowings
- Pronominal gender
- Congruent lexicalization in lexical borrowings
- Phonological blends

3.1. Intra-sentential code switching

In Myers-Scotton (2006:241 ff), a distinction is made between inter-sentential code switching and intra-sentential code switching. The former is a switching that occurs between sentences; the latter is a switching within a sentence.

In intra-sentential code switching, we have singly occurring words and Embedded Islands (EI). In an EI, all the content and system morphemes come from the Embedded Language (EL) and follow the well-formedness requirements of the EL (Myers-Scotton 2006:261).

(2a) is an example with a singly occurring word; (2b) shows an Embedded Island, where we have pure Faroese past tense *livdi* 'lived'. What is printed in bold face is Faroese. The rest is Danish.

(2a) det er faktisk meget spændende, man får et **upplivlsi** (MY1V)¹
 it is actually very exciting, one gets an experience
 'Actually it is very exciting, as one gets an experience out of it'

(2b) ...men min far, **hann livdi** ikke så godt
 but my father, he lived not so good
 'but my father, he was sick'

(2a) illustrates another point in intra-sentential code switching, namely that the determiners may come from the Matrix Language (ML; see Jake, Myers-Scotton and Gross 2002; Myers-Scotton 2002; Muysken 2000:78), which is exactly what we find in *et upplivlsi* 'an experience', with the Danish article *et* + a Faroese noun.

3.2. Inter-sentential code switching

When words are missing, or when the speaker thinks that what s/he wants to express is better said in another language than the one selected, another communicative means is to make use of inter-sentential code switching, as in (3). Note also the older usage past participle *bleven* ~ Faroese *blivin*, as opposed to current Danish *blevet* 'become'. The speaker is an 85 years old woman from Eysturoy. She talks about the first time they heard an airplane and the reaction of her grandmother. Note also the Embedded Island in (3): [CP nu [C skal [TP de [T **signa** [NP **tykkum**]]]]]; lit.: 'now shall you cross yourselves...'. Past participles may come from the Matrix Language (Danish) or the Embedded Language (Faroese), as they are Early System Morphemes, just as plurals (Myers-Scotton 2002).

- (3) Vi var ude at høste, ude i marken, og så kommer der sådan noget, og min farmor, hun var bleven gammel, og så siger hun, ja, 'nu skal I', du ved, ja, '**nú skulu tit signa tykkum**', **eg veit ikki**, hvad det kaldes på dansk, ja, 'nu skal de 'signa tykkum for jeg tror det er verdens ende'. (WO1EY/)

'We were out haymaking, out in the field, and then there comes such a thing, and my grandmother, she had become old, and then she says, yes 'now you have to', you know, yes 'now you should cross yourselves', I don't know what it's called in Danish, yes, 'now you have to cross yourselves for I believe it's the end of the world'.

3.3. Convergence

Convergence is, according to Myers-Scotton (2006):

speech by bilinguals that has all the surface-level forms from one language, but with **part of the abstract lexical structure** that underlies the surface-level patterns **coming from another language** (or languages). (Myers-Scotton 2006:271; boldface in original)

An example of convergence is given in (4) (from Hammershaimb 1891).

- (4) Jeg har prøvet **at arbejdet**... (WY4EY/N)
 Eg havi prøvað **at arbeitt**... (Far.)
 Jeg har prøvet **at arbejde** (Dan.)
 'I have tried to work [in a restaurant]'

3.4. Nonce-borrowings

A nonce-borrowing is a borrowing used for the nonce, that is for this one time only. I have found some nonce-borrowings in Gøtudanskt: Faroese words that are adapted into Danish as pure Danish words. Nonce-borrowings are singly occurring switches with ML phonology. In (5), *modpregver* 'disproves' is a nonce-borrowing.

- (5) ...fordi det **modpregver**, modbeviser evolutionsteorien (MY1V)
 ...because it disproves, disproves evolution theory-the
 '...because it disproves the theory of evolution'

3.5. Pronominal gender deviation

There are not many gender deviations in my material. Up till now, I have only found nine occurrences (in 24 interviews, each of approximately 30 minutes in length), of pronominal gender used with concrete nouns. The gender is according to the gender rules of Faroese, as when a speaker, MO1EY/N, speaks about a *mine* 'mine' (~ Far. *mina-f.*), and refers to it with the Faroese pronoun *hon* and later with the Danish pronoun *hun* 'she'. Even though the gender is in accordance with Faroese gender rules, it is remarkable that all the nouns referred to in this way are concrete count nouns, which should not allow for gender distinction.

3.6. Congruent lexicalization in lexical borrowings

Muysken (2000) refers to congruent lexicalization in lexical borrowings in, for example, Australian German. There are examples with a German head: *Beachlandschaft* 'beach landscape' or an English head: *Kettenstore* 'chain store' (Muysken 2000:150).

Congruent lexicalizations occur also in Gøtudanskt, as when a woman, WY2EY/N, talks about how one may *upplever* 'experience' more in Denmark. The head of the compound is Danish *-lever*, the first part of the compound is Faroese *upp-*, not Danish *op-*. Another example, from the same informant, is *idrætsskúlin*, with a Faroese head, *skúlin*, and Danish *idræts-* ('sport's'; lit. 'sport school').

3.7. Phonological blends or word-internal mixing

There are some phonological blends or word internal mixing in the material, as in *børser* 'guns', (WO2T), with a retroflex -s [♣]; notice the Faroese noun *byrsa* 'gun', but the Danish vowel -ø. Another example is in the word for *sugar*, which is pronounced as /su:ker/, not as the Danish *sukker* [σåγ□] or as the Faroese /συγ*Y♦/.

4. Concluding remarks

We have shown that although the origin of the term Gøtudanskt may be due to the teacher from the village of Gøta, the term, as understood today, is Danish spoken by Faroe Islanders following the written standard. Especially members of the older generation use Gøtudanskt. We have also shown some of the most striking examples of Gøtudanskt, and have pointed out that more research is needed on the phonetics of Gøtudanskt.

SFB 538 Mehrsprachigkeit

Max-Brauer-Allee 60

D-22767 Hamburg

Germany

hjalmar.petersen@uni-hamburg.de

hjalpet@post.olivant.fo

Note

1. The abbreviations are: M= Man, W = Woman. O = Old, Y = Young. V = Vágar, S = Suðuroy, T = Tórshavn, EY/N = Eysturoy, Norðuroyggjar.

References

- Hammershaimb, Venceslaus Ulricus 1891. Færøsk Antologi. København: Samfund til udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur.
- Jake, Janice L., Carol Myers-Scotton & Steven Gross. 2002. Making a minimalist approach to code switching work. Adding the Matrix Language. *Bilingualism* 5.69-91.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol. 2002. *Contact Linguistics: Bilingual Encounters and Grammatical Outcomes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Myers-Scotton, Carol. 2006. *Multiple Voices. An Introduction to Bilingualism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Muysken, Pieter. 2000. *Bilingual speech. A typology of code mixing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Poulsen, Jóhan Hendrik Winter. 1993. Some remarks on *gøtudanskt*. In: Twenty-eight papers presented to Hans Bekker-Nielsen on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, 28 April 1993. Odense: Odense University Press, 111-116.