

The language of *The Julekalender*

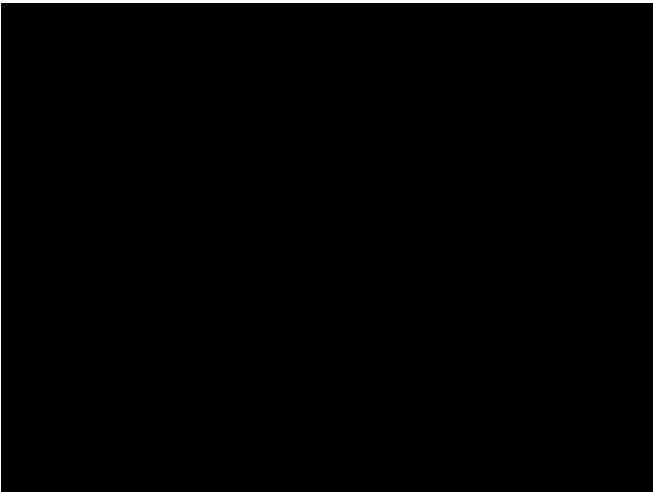
Af [Peter Bakker](#) 14. december 2011 • I kategorien [Sjov](#) • [📧](#) [📷](#) [📘](#) [🌐](#)

This winter, Danish television repeats the daily Christmas program [The Julekalender](#), originally produced in 1991.

In Scandinavia, there is a long tradition of television series in 24 episodes of a story that relates to Christmas, all through the month of December. This is called a [Julekalender](#), a Christmas Kalender. *The Julekalender* is said to be the one that has been most often repeated. Last time in 2008.

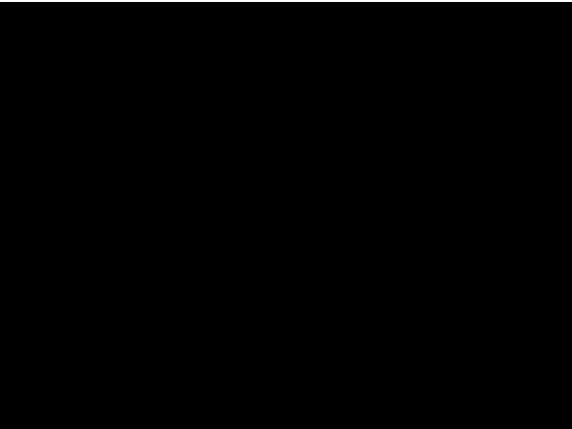
A special type of little people, locally called [Nisse](#), plural *Nisser*, usually play a prominent role in these series. They interact in different ways with the human world, and they are mostly invisible to humans. They play a role in Danish folk beliefs – especially for children. *The Julekalender* has a mixed Danish-English title: the noun is Danish, the definite article *the* is from English.

Here is an example: *The Støvledance* (The Boot Dance), courtesy Bellevue Entertainment



The Julekalender is toback. From the right: Nisserne Fritz, Gynther and Hansi

And here are the lyrics (not quite correctly spelled, though :-)



Whenever *The Julekalender* is shown on Danish television, the languages used in the Julekalender leads to discussion among the viewers. School children imitate the Jutlandish accent of the Potato trader, and his set phrase “*De' bår dæjli!*” (“that’s just fine”) is used regularly for comical effects in diverse social circles in Denmark. The Copenhageners also attracts attention: *bob, bob, bob*. Most remarkable, however, is the language – or is it a language? – used by the *Nisser* in the series. They speak a mixture of English and Danish.

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Strangely enough, people who comment on the language describe the type of mixture in completely different ways. Members of mixed English-Danish families said it was very funny for them, because “we speak exactly like that at home”. Some viewers say that the language has an English grammatical structure and Danish words – or the other way around. Others say the verbs are from one language, and the nouns from another – here again, Danish verbs with English nouns, or the other way around. There are in fact examples of real languages with exactly this type of structure.

However, the impressions that people had of the language were completely different from reality – as is often the case with regards to linguistic matters. For instance, most people believe that young people swear more than old people. This has been shown not to be true (Rathje & Andersen 2005). Likewise, the impression that adolescent second generation immigrants swear more than their Danish peers was so widespread that the Danish government even announced that they wanted to put a halt to this by setting money aside. (You start wondering, by the way, how you can use money to get people not to swear). But, according to the data collected by Quist (2005), Danes of other ethnic origin swear much less than the Danish teenagers. And there is a widespread belief that scientists use less and less Danish and replace it with English. This also appears to be an unsubstantiated exaggeration when the facts are investigated (Madsen 2008).

If one wants to find out how the *Nisse*-language really is structured in its combination of English and Danish, one has to study this in detail. As I have myself engaged in the study of [mixed languages](#) (e.g. Matras & Bakker 2003), I was more than happy when one of our students, the fluently bilingual Margaret J. Blake, offered to analyze the language of the *Nisser*. Her detailed study is the result of her painstaking research on the corpus of Nissesprog. It is an academic work of high standing.

People will tend to ask: Why would one study the obviously fictitious language of a species of creatures that few humans have ever have communicated with? In fact, people may object, there is no scientific proof that *Nisser* exist.

There are several reasons why it is worth studying this artificial language. First of all, the *Nisse*-language is a beautiful example of all the creative things that humans are able to do with their language, in this case the combination of two languages. This language is a conscious creation of a small group of people, *De Nattergale*. Is the result similar to what happens unconsciously in the real world, or is reality of the spontaneous mixture of languages, as done by many humans, beyond the limits of artists' imagination? We give some examples below from American Danish speakers below, so readers can compare.

Many bilinguals codeswitch, i.e. they combine two languages in one sentence. The study of this phenomenon sheds light on how the human mind is organized, and on the mental organization of sentence production.

One can also mention a few dozen new mixed languages that have emerged and stabilized in the course of the history of mankind (Bakker & Mous 1994, Bakker 1997). These tend to show structures that are often quite different from what one observes in codeswitching. Do these real languages show similarities in the nature of their mixture with the language combination in the artificially created *Nisse*-language?

How does this relate to the neural capacities of humans? How is it possible that bilingual listeners can understand conversations in which two languages are intricately mixed? Apparently our brain is flexible enough to process two languages at the same time. Neurolinguistic research and the study of bilingualism complement one another.

In short, many extremely challenging questions are raised through this language mixture of the *Nisser*.

Margaret Blake's study, however, does not provide an answer to all of these questions. It does show that there is a certain system to the mixture, but in fact unlike any of the impressions that listeners had. And unlike any of the documented cases of language mixture.

In many bilingual communities, people tend to mix languages. This is very natural, and not a sign of language decline. It appears that those individuals who mix the languages most, are often also those who are the best speakers of the two languages separately. This phenomenon is called codeswitching or codemixing (see e.g. Muysken & Milroy, Muysken 2000, or in the Danish context publications of the [Køge project](#) by J.N. Jørgensen, Andersen, Esdahl, Havgaard, Holmen, Karrebæk).

Danish in North America

English-Danish codeswitching has been documented from several parts of the world. There are a number of publications on the use of Danish and the impact of English on the language use of Danish emigrants to North America. Petersen (1988) studied a child who mixed Danish and English. Stølen (1992, 1996) has described the humorous combination of the two languages in prose and song texts. Some people just use some English words in their Danish, but it can be quite extreme. Here are some stunning examples from people who emigrated to the United States and who were interviewed by two Danish linguists several decades after their arrival in a predominantly English-speaking environment (from Kjør & Baumann Larsen 1973, 1974):

“Well, that is the way det er. You see, al ting har changed, de last forty or fifty år al ting har changed, det er en hel difference, en helt different way. Just [jusd] like farming, you know, en farmer kan farne selv to til tre hundrede acres, selv.”

“I'll tell you in Denmark det koster så terrible much when de er finished with eight grade school, then de går ind til highere school, der er very expensive, and I had nothing but what I could sow. I sowed for my living, not exactly dressmaking, but I levede in Svendborg og var married and levede in Svendborg.”

“Ja, vi ejede the farm, you know, ja. And min kone hun var kind syg, og jeg selv har sådan en kind hearttrouble. Ja, det er hjertet, det bankede så snart, at jeg skulle do hårdt arbejde. Så jeg kunne ikke stand at arbejde. Så vi had to quit and move og kom over here. Det er jo sådan, at der er jo en time [taim] for os alle, vi kan do så meget og not mere.”

Even though this is superficially similar to what is found in the *Nisser*'s language, there are important differences.

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engelsk esperanto Formidling fransk identitet
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dk.kultur.sprog
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Nye ord i dansk på nettet (NOID)
Ordbog over det danske sprog
Ordnet. Dansk sprog i ordbøger og korpus
Sproget.dk
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Brug af The Støvle Dance video er sket med accept fra Bellevue Entertainment.

juli 2009

juni 2009

maj 2009

april 2009

marts 2009

Peter Bakker, lektor

Afdelingen for Lingvistisk, Aarhus Universitet

Læs også:

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6 kommentarer



Dennis Kronborg

14. december 2011 • 21:13

Hej Peter,

Glimrende artikel. Udførlig litteratur / note liste. Undre mig lidt at du har benyttet en copyright beskyttet video og sang, uden at kreditere den?

Vi er rettighedejer på alt materiale på "The Julekalneder", og vil sætte pris på om du vil tilføje os til dine noter. Nu har du jo ikke spurgt om lov til at bruge videoen, men hvis du er villig til at kreditere os; "Brug af The Støvel Dance" video er sket med accept fra Bellevue Entertainment, så vil jeg godt lade som om du havde spurgt først;-)

God jul.

Mvh

Dennis Kronborg

Direktør

Bellevue Entertainment

Svar



Peter Bakker

15. december 2011 • 19:22

Tak for complimentet. Der står nu faktisk en tekst om accept, som redaktionen har tilføjet. Filmen kommer i øvrigt fra Youtube; det er vel ikke et problem at indlejre det i et bidrag. Jeg har selv videoen og DVD.

Mvh, Peter Bakker

Svar



Daria Morgounova Schwalbe

22. december 2011 • 14:23

Kære Peter,

Tusind tak for en spændende artikel. Jeg finder den ret underholdende. Tænker, at det kunne også være sjovt at sammenligne nissesprog med (og effekten af) de adskillige kunstsprog /'artificial languages', som bruges f.eks. i The Lord of the Rings og Avatar. bh, Daria

Svar



Hans Degn

26. december 2011 • 16:59

Viggo Barfod skrev under pseudonymet Ærbødigst på bagsiden af Berlingste Tidende den 6. maj 1945 nedenstående digt på nissetyisk. Hvis der er andre, der kender tekster på nissetyisk, vil jeg opfordre dem til at meddele det her. Der vil sikkert kunne skabes grundlag for oprettelse af en Afdeling for Sammenlignende

Nissesprovidenskab.

Søndag 6. maj 1945:

De vordende studenter skal i morgen skrive – tysk genfortælling. På mirakuløs måde er vi kommet i besiddelse af en besvarelse

Es war einmal ein Bösewicht
mit ein sympatisches Gesicht,
mit Knurrhaar unter seine Nase,
som hat gezittert in Ekstase.
Før han blev til das grosse Tier
war er ein kleiner Tapetzier,
der tapezierte Speisezimmer
(das hätte er nur sollen immer)
Men noget stort er wolte sein,
- der kleine Tapetziererlein -
Det blev han, for han var jo fleissig,
in Neunzehnhundreddreiunddreissig.
Er brüllte so im Sportpalast,
at alle trommehinder brast.
Denn wenn er sprach zu seinen Nazi,
dann war er morderlig kurasig.
Bald war er Führer ikke blot,
men grösser als der liebe Gott.
Und alle seine Volksgenossen
han sendte mutig ud zu slaassen.
Und ging es gut, dann war er kæk.
Men ging es schlecht, saa blev han frech
und mehr hysterisch als der Kaiser,
- denn Wilhelm war kein Teppichbeisser -
Er wollte nehmen Stalingrad!
Det blev ein traurig Resultat.
Er wollte England ausradieren.
(Er hätte sollen tapetzieren)
Zulezt kam Adolf nach Berlin,
wo Sjukow wollte grüssen ihn,
und dann hat er den Kopf verloren
- og saa gik Adolf under jorden.
Herr Göbbels fik ein lang Gesicht:
-Ach warum spricht der Führer nicht?
Zwölf Uhr slog da omsider klokken.
Er sprach – er sprok – er ist gesprochen!

Svar



Hans Degn

21. maj 2012 • 08:31

Her er en anden tekst på nissetysk

<http://www.studieportalen.dk/Forums/Thread.aspx?id=1195878>

Svar

Trackbacks

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Hjemmeside

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