

# Primary school language reveals if you move away or stay behind, research finds

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Students, who grow up speaking a dialect, often begin to pick up standard Danish already in primary school, new research shows.

The way you speak in primary school reveals if you will stay behind in your native part of the country or head for the big city to get an education. This is one of the conclusions in University of Copenhagen linguist Malene Monka's new PhD thesis.

"My research shows that young people, who end up moving away from their native area to seek an [education](#) and career elsewhere, change the way they speak already in their early youth. They speak less [dialect](#) than comparable [peers](#) at the same age," Malene Monka from LANCHART at University of Copenhagen explains.

During the late 70's and 80's, a group of Danish linguists conducted

interviews with a large group of informants who were finishing [primary school](#). Now, together with a colleague from The University of Southern Denmark, Malene Monka has re-interviewed the same informants.

She compared six mobile informants (that is, people who have moved away) with a group of informants that have stayed behind in their native area. Subsequently, she analyzed and compared a large number of different dialectal traits in the new and the old interviews. Her research has been conducted in three different municipalities in three different parts of Denmark.

## **Standard Danish is the language of the school**

The language comparison of the mobile and the settled informants showed that there was a big difference in the [spoken language](#) of the two groups of informants – even long before the mobile informants had moved to the city. The informants were of the same age, sex and social class and still the difference was significant.

"When I started finding the dialect traits, it became clear that the ones that would eventually move away spoke less dialect while they were living in their native area. Even though they had precisely the same background as the informants who stayed behind. Linguistically you prepare to move long before your mind is aware of it, Malene Monka says and offers an explanation of the [phenomenon](#):

"The, maybe somewhat boring, explanation is that the Danish school system is made for standard Danish. If you want to make it in the educational system, you need to speak standard Danish. It permeates the language society and you do not even need to be aware of what you are doing. Standard Danish is the language of the school."

Provided by University of Copenhagen

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