“PLUS THAT I BELIEVE IT IS AN INNOVATION...”
On the marginal construction with plus at as an initial conjunction in modern spoken Danish

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This paper is about variation and how to make sense of it. It takes as its material a construction that has been treated as a new part of the system of Danish and Swedish, viz. the plus at (‘plus that’) construction (Nørgård-Sørensen 2001, Julien 2009). The corpus I have used to evaluate claims about this construction is the LANCHART corpus of spoken Danish from 1970 to 2010 (Gregersen 2009, Gregersen and Barner-Rasmussen 2011, Gregersen et al. in press). The data from the LANCHART corpus show that the construction has a specific use (and function), that not very many informants use it and that those who do overwhelmingly use only one instance. Thus, the construction may safely be said to be marginal at least in the corpus data. The issue is how to theorize this. This is the theme of the final section.

Keywords: Danish; marginal constructions; conjunctions

1. Plus at – as an innovation in the system of Danish

In 2001, Jens Nørgård-Sørensen proudly presented the most recent newcomer to the otherwise rather closed class of conjunctions in Danish, plus at (Eng. ‘plus that’). He notes that the oldest occurrence of the construction in the corpus of the Danish Language Board is from 1965 and goes on to give a number of recent examples, partly from his own (re)collections of spoken dialogue. The thrust of his argument is that the construction is an innovation. This tallies well with the fact that the use of plus (‘plus’) as a conjunction is not present at all in the older Danish dictionary (Ordbog over det Danske Sprog, henceforth ODS), cf. volume 16 (1936), column 1060ff., whereas it is in fact documented in the new Danish dictionary (corpus-based Den Danske Ordbog, henceforth DDO, which appeared 2005, cf. volume 4: 570). In the DDO, the entry for plus at is labelled as being particularly frequent in spoken language and the example given is from a collection of interviews at Lyngby Commercial School, North of Copenhagen: “vi er ved at lave en film . . . så det bruger jeg en masse af min tid på, plus at jeg også er sammen med mine venner (‘we are making a film . . . so I spend a lot of my time on that, plus that I am a lot together with my friends’).
Nørgård-Sørensen has to meet the following criteria in order for him to conclude that the construction is indeed a construction (and not just a special use of ‘plus’), that it is an innovation and that it has its special place in the system of conjunctions: first of all, he has to show that the construction cannot be reduced to a combination of the previously known adverb plus and the likewise very well-known Danish conjunction at, the subordinating conjunction in Danish par excellence. Nørgård-Sørensen convincingly demonstrates that this is a new use of plus and that this new use cannot be separated from the occurrence of at. Hence, plus at must be viewed as a complex conjunction (in the manner of så at [‘so that’], for at ['in order to'], etc.). The crucial structural place that the conjunction occupies in the Danish system seems to be that of and that meaning that the plus at is coordinating rather than subordinating. As for the question of whether this is an innovation, Nørgård-Sørensen argues his case on the basis of the available corpora, which did not at that time include any systematic spoken language corpus. This is the reason why it is interesting to review the case now when we have a large corpus of spoken Danish at our disposal.

The Nørgård-Sørensen (2001) analysis may be summarized as follows (based on his own summary, p. 73):

- **Plus at** introduces a clause that is structured as an embedded clause, only there is no explicit matrix clause in the immediate context.
- Prosodically, there is a slight caesura before the plus, and the plus is pronounced with emphasis.\(^1\)
- Contentwise the construction completes what Nørgård-Sørensen calls an *assemblage* (Danish ‘ophobning’). It thus presupposes an assemblage in the immediate context preceding the *plus at*. The assemblage may for the purpose of this paper be defined as a collection of propositions that make up a list, i.e. are treated as alike in some respect, most often as arguments to the same effect.
- Both formally and contentwise the *plus at* construction is akin to the paratactic conjunction *plus*, which probably accounts for its origin.

Nørgård-Sørensen argues that the lack of an explicit matrix clause indicates that this special conjunction has an underlying matrix stemming from the neustic function (Hare 1970) of all sentences (p. 76ff.): An implicit *I say to you that* is proposed to be the matrix for the *plus at*. Nørgård-Sørensen notes that the construction is pragmatically specialized to more or less professional language users and explicitly writes that it is not found in informal conversations unless a

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\(^1\) Judging by the examples found in the LANCHART corpus, this seems not universally to be the case. Hearing the sound files corresponding to the segments transcribed and found by the search engine as *plus at* clauses, I detected one exception. This could, however, be due to what the CA literature terms a “rush-through”. If that was indeed the case, there may thus be overriding factors.
discussion develops in which you have the build-up of an argument involving an assemblage (p. 79).

2. A quantitative characterization of the occurrences in a spoken language corpus

The LANCHART corpus consists of a number of interlocking and similarly structured data sets, based on systematic recordings of informants carried out during a period from 1970 to 1989 and re-recordings of the same informants carried out from 2005 till now. At the time of writing, the LANCHART corpus consists of transcriptions of 597 recordings of spoken Danish featuring 637 different speakers from seven sites in Denmark (Gregersen 2009, Gregersen and Barner-Rasmussen 2011, Gregersen et al. in press). In total, the corpus includes 6,565,387 word tokens representing 77,662 word types (not quite equivalent to dictionary lemmas because the word types include all the various inflected forms of the same lemma as separate types). The corpus has been automatically Part of Speech tagged (PoS-tagged), and it is searchable through a search engine that takes the transcriptions as its basic input. The search engine is able to search for strings in context, in this case thus plus immediately before at.

As of January 2012, there were 84 instances of plus at in the LANCHART corpus as a whole. In comparison there were a total 88,101 instances of word forms, which the automatic Part of Speech tagging recognized as subordinating conjunctions. So by all accounts, the figure for the plus at construction is not impressive, and that may itself be an indication of the peripheral nature of this specific conjunction. This raises the issue of frequency, which will be relevant throughout this paper.

I searched the 56 million words KorpusDK (2007) mainly including written language at http://ordnet.dk/korpusdk/ using the advanced function and specifying a maximum of three words intervening between the first word form, plus, and the second word form, at, and found a total of 129 occurrences, which, however, had to be reduced to 38. The reasons for the reduction were the following: The specification that there could be up to three words intervening caused some noise to be present in the search result in the guise of a noun like det faktum at (‘the fact that’) or den omstændighed at (‘the circumstance that’); several examples were with the infinitive and thus had to excluded, and even more were with the noun plus, which would then be modified (and explained) by an at-sentence. Finally, one sentence manifested a proper name Auto Plus and one sentence had the plus at construction embedded in a parenthetical (which is interesting but infrequent, the example was from a debate). This weeding out thus resulted in the 38 occurrences, and again we may conclude that this is not a frequent construction. To obtain a measure of relative frequency, I follow the lead of Julien (2009), who in her analysis of the construction in (written) Swedish and related languages uses an index of number of occurrences per million running words.
If we compare the figures from the Danish searches and relate them to the index Julien uses, we get the following:

KorpusDK: 0.7
LANCHART: 12.8

As Julien’s highest number of relative frequency is 5.1, we may note that either the plus at construction, though peripheral, is rather more frequent in Danish or the difference between the Julien and the LANCHART figures is due to the difference between the spoken and written mode. A final possibility has to do with infrequent elements in general. The uncertainty is obviously greater. In any case, we may conclude that the construction seems to be more frequent in spoken language of the type we have been recording in the LANCHART study than we would suppose from Nørgård-Sørensen’s analysis.

The LANCHART corpus makes it possible to characterize the 84 occurrences in a number of dimensions and we will do so in the following. The aim is to demonstrate, if possible, the differences in the frequency of use among the subgroups we are able to discern. The LANCHART data sets are different in geography and for each data set it is possible to create subgroups consisting of informants having the same gender, the same generation in terms of years of birth, or the same social class. As the LANCHART study investigates language change in real time on the basis of recordings versus the re-recordings, the final possibility is to contrast old recordings and new ones. Thus, the dimensions investigated are time, geography, class and gender. Obviously, the contrast in time is relevant to the question of whether the plus at construction is in fact an innovation. Until now, our best evidence is the absence of an entry in the ODS (versus the presence of one in the DDO), but with the LANCHART corpus we may have further evidence. Was it present in the earliest recordings at all, was it less frequent than it is now (i.e. in the new recordings) and what is the distribution across generations (i.e. in so-called apparent time) in the old data set versus the new one? If the hypothesis of an innovation is to hold water, we would expect the construction to have a history that would be reflected in the LANCHART data. And keep in mind that Nørgård-Sørensen (2001, 65) frames his discussion of the plus at as an innovation in the spoken language, which only gradually is integrated into the written language (and only then may be documented).

2.1 Time

A first characterization of the instances might conceivably be whether we can see any difference in time. And indeed we can, as shown in Figure 1.

But again we have to control for the difference in the data sets: technically what we have is the number of filled-out slices in the transcriptions. A slice is the electronic equivalent of a word but it may contain other things than orthographical words because transcriptions of speech should also be able to indicate false starts, hesitations and pauses. With that proviso in mind we may give
and use the number of filled-out slices as the control so that we may approximate the index of relative frequency used by Julien. Using the convention of referring to all old recordings as S1s and all re-recordings and new recordings as S2s, the numbers are S1: 2,221,122; S2: 4,344,265. The proportion of occurrences of plus at constructions per million running words is 11.7 for S1 and 13.3 for S2.

A more clear result would of course have been that there were no instances in the old recordings and 84 in the new ones, but as it is, the advent of this construction must have happened before the bulk of the S1 recordings. If we still take the ODS as the limit backwards in time we are still faced with a period between 1936 and 1965 when the first example was documented. Any date between 1936 and 1965 will do as the construction’s birthday.

But if we look a bit closer at the time distribution in the sample, we can see more: there is only 1 occurrence in the 1970 recordings, while the rest of the 26 are from 1987 to 1989. In the S2 recordings, the time slice is so narrow that we do not expect any development as to recording years. But we may look at the generational distribution to get a clearer picture of the construction’s distribution within the S2 recordings. The LANCHART study recognizes five generations: generation 0, born before 1942; generation 1, born between 1942 and 1963; generation 2, born between 1964 and 1973; generation 2.5, born between 1981 and 1986; and, finally, generation 3, born between 1987 and 1996. There is no tendency for any of the generations to excel particularly in the production of plus at clauses as may be seen from Figure 2.

We conclude that there is some evidence that if the plus at construction is seen as an innovation, the innovation happened between 1936 and 1965.
This interpretation seems to be consistent with the fact that we do not have many occurrences in the 1970 LANCHART recordings but on the other hand, there are not enough words in this particular data set for us to expect that anyway. But when the bulk of the S1 recordings took place, i.e. in the period between 1978 and 1989, the construction was already fairly frequent. This indicates either a rapid spread of a recent innovation or that our data from the innovating period are too biased towards the written language to offer much assistance in the quest for the gradual development of a construction that has its origin in the spoken language.

2.2 Geography

The relevant sites in the LANCHART study are Vinderup (VIN) in Western Jutland; Odder (ODD) in Eastern Jutland; Næstved (NÆS), 100 km South of Copenhagen on Zealand; and CPH, the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen, itself, also on Zealand. In Table 1, we have distributed the number of occurrences in the LANCHART corpus that we may safely place at one of these four sites.

Table 1 documents that the Vinderup informants, although they are geographically much further away from Copenhagen than Odder, and in particular than Næstved, are on a par with Copenhagen as to relative frequency of use of the plus at construction. This is, however, an artefact; this is only so in the S2 recordings.

There is a general problem here that I would like to dwell at: a correction by looking at the total data set is one possibility. This is what I have shown in Table 1 and what Julien has done and as far as I understand this is the standard practice in not too sophisticated corpus work. Another approach would be to look for the relevant paradigm: Which options make up the envelope of variation
(Milroy and Gordon 2003, 152ff., with reference to phonological variation) for the plus at construction? This would mean specifying which other lexical items could perform either the same or equivalent functions for the speaker. This is a thorny question and I cannot see any solution to it, partly because the functions specified either get too general (i.e. in this case parataxis) or too specific (i.e. introducing the last item in an assemblage). In the absence of a solution here, I have opted for the most general correction, i.e. the size of the data set as a whole. Anyway, a Chi-square test does not show any significant differences at all.

The pattern shown in Table 1 is peculiar. If the plus at construction is indeed an innovation we would suppose that its centre was Copenhagen; this has been the case for almost all changes in the period studied (cf. Maegaard et al. 2012, and the literature cited therein). This does indeed fit the relative difference between the Copenhagen and the Odder and Næstved figures. But if the innovation centre was Copenhagen, why would the Vinderup informants use it quite as much? The answer might be supposed to lie in the composition of the Vinderup data set. We have relatively fewer words from generations 0–2.5 and relatively more from generation 3 in Vinderup. So, if the change is indeed spreading from Copenhagen, generation 3 will pick it up, and there are many generation 3 informants from Vinderup.

But here the re-recordings modify the picture. Vinderup generation 2 informants are in fact in the S2 emulating the Copenhagen norm quite closely and in so doing distance themselves from previous generations in Vinderup. This is also the case with a number of other variables studied in the LANCHART project (Maegaard et al. 2012). It does seem to be the case that we have an innovation spreading from Copenhagen but at an uneven pace. Of the four sites studied, only Vinderup actually has hit the moving target, viz. the Copenhagen pattern.

Nevertheless, this conclusion should be tempered with some caution. The data sets are not quite similar in all respects. First of all, the S1 material from Vinderup consists of single person interviews and group discussions with pupils in the eighth grade, i.e. informants at the age of 14—16 years. We cannot expect this construction, which (cf. below) belongs to a fully fledged rhetorical style used in argumentative passages (cf. Nørgård-Sørensen 2001) to be frequent in language use at that age, at least not in the S1 period, although we do find it in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Data set in slices</th>
<th>Ratio pr. mio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPH</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3,100,926</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NÆS</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1,461,318</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODD</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,126,958</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>682,767</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The correction for size of data set shows that Copenhagen and Vinderup group together versus Næstved and Odder. Abbreviations: CPH, Copenhagen; NÆS, Næstved; ODD, Odder; VIN, Vinderup. ‘Ratio pr. mio’ is the ratio of the construction per million running words.

Table 1. The 83 occurrences of plus at clauses distributed in space.
S2 recordings with 3 pupils from the ninth grade in Næstved and one 18-year-old Copenhagener interviewed for another data set, viz. the CLARIN project. Secondly, the S1 Odder recordings are different again in that they do not have the same genre dispersion (Gregersen, Beck Nielsen and Thøgersen 2009) as the Næstved and Copenhagen S1 interviews and the S2 interviews in general. The original interviewers for the Odder project, Bent Jul Nielsen and Magda Nyberg, did not aim for an intimate style or any breach with formality at all (cf. Jul Nielsen and Nyberg 1992). If the plus at construction is found only in informal conversation when an argument is unfolding, it should not be in the Odder S1 recordings at all, and sure enough, only one individual produces it.

So, in the Odder S1, the construction may either have been very rare (only one instance), or it might be the case that the fieldwork method used did not elicit it or stimulate it. This restriction on the data available is well known from language history. We can never have direct access to a past reality; we only find its, necessarily partial, reflection in the data.

Finally, it is rather interesting that we only find one instance at all in the earliest Copenhagen recordings from 1970. These recordings, originating with Mette Mortensen’s MA thesis work, feature precisely argumentative reasoning, i.e. situations where the construction might be supposed to occur. That it does not, except for one case, has already been used as an indication of its status as an innovation.

2.3 Class and Gender

In Figure 3, I have plotted the informants’ gender and class affiliation against S1 and S2 and a curious pattern of crossover emerges: in the S1, the middle class (MC) males seem to have more instances than the other groups whereas the S2 clearly has the working class (WC) females in the lead. This is again an artefact: The amount of plus at clauses for the WC women in the S2 are due to one single informant having 12 instances. This is by far the highest number of instances in the whole corpus and the next highest result is at four instances, produced by an MC woman in the S1.

The informant who produced the 12 instances in the S2 was interviewed twice, but in the S1 she did not produce any instances at all. If the construction was idiosyncratic, peculiar in its frequency of use for this individual, it would have been nice if she had produced at least some in the S1 recording, but she did not. Here, field methods were the same in the S1 and the S2, so only the informant’s age can explain the difference: She did not have it (or use it) in the

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2 The CLARIN data set is the LANCHART deliverance to the Danish CLARIN project, which again is affiliated with clarin.eu. It consists of 16 single-person interviews and 4 group sessions with the same 18-year-old informants, evenly distributed as to institutional affiliation (two types of high school) and gender, which were both audio- and video-recorded. The transcriptions, the sound files and the video files will eventually be publicly available through the Danish CLARIN infrastructure at https://clarin.dk/clarindk/forside.jsp.
equivalent speech event in the S1, but she uses it excessively (and thus by all measures “have it”) in the S2. Thus, we can be sure that this was not a frequent, idiosyncratic construction for her when she was interviewed at the age of 19, but when the re-recording took place almost 20 years later it does look like the excessive use is an idiosyncrasy on the part of this informant.

The second notable factor in Figure 3 is the 14 instances produced by MC men in S1. Of these 14 instances, 8 were produced by the 4 male interviewers and one of the interviewers produced 4 tokens in 4 different recordings. This is in itself remarkable and I will come back to why the interviewers produce any plus at clauses below (cf. section 4.3), but it also opens the door for an interpretation along the lines of priming. This may be rather quickly dispelled, though: Only in one instance do we find both an informant and an interviewer producing the plus at construction during their conversation.

Summing up the quantitative evidence, we find that the plus at construction is probably an innovation, probably originating in Copenhagen at some time between 1936 and 1965 but rather quickly reaching the level of relative frequency that it has now. The construction is, however, not now, and probably has never been, central to the spoken language of modern Danes: only 5 of the persons participating in the recordings either as interviewers or informants produced more than two instances, and 34 of a total of 49 producers produced only one instance. Please bear in mind that the total number of possible producers of the
plus at in the LANCHART corpus is 637 representing two more sites than the four actually represented, and a total of five generations. Surely, this is not a construction that everybody produces. For the time being, we conclude that the plus at construction is marginal. In the next section we take a look at its use.

3. Analysis of 2 of the 12 instances produced by one informant

To flesh out what the construction is used for, in this section we will focus on 2 of the 12 utterances produced by a 38-year-old female whom we have labelled as belonging to the working class. (This class affiliation may in fact be challenged as to the S2 recording but this is not the point here.) We start by looking at example 10 (of 12) because it shows the mechanics of this construction in a comparatively short passage.

The plus at construction should be understood as a rhetorical device. In general, conjunctions are used to structure long passages of propositions so that their relative hierarchy is made explicit. The plus at is no exception but it has its unique place in longer stretches of talk and thus is not normally used where only two propositions are ordered. This necessitates long stretches of talk for illustration, so that the plus at construction is embedded in its extended context, in particular all the relevant preceding units of talk (cf. Nørgård-Sørensen’s analysis of the assemblage above). There is thus no substitute for good old textual analysis. Hence, I simply read the whole transcript, noted every time there was a plus at construction and then delimited the relevant passage in order to look closer at the rhetorical structure.

Example 10: (of the 12 examples in total. I give the number to show where in the total sum of occurrences the example is placed)

interviewer (Intv): har du oplevet sådan at øh der nogensinde er nogen der har
informant (Inf): så

Intv: drillet dig eller mobbet dig på grund af den måde du talte
        teased you or bullied you because of the way you spoke
eller har du nogensinde prøvet
or have you ever tried
Inf: nej nej kun
        no no only

3 There is one interesting counterexample to this in the KorpusDK search where one passage features two plus ats within one sentence: af metadon så de har til 14 dage eller lignende plus at de altså klarer at sælge til deres underhold, plus at de klarer at være velklädte og have en nydelig tilværelse (‘of metadon so that they have enough for a fortnight or the like plus that they manage to be able to sell so that they are kept, plus that they manage to be well dressed and have a nice life’). The text is from the negotiations at the Copenhagen local parliament in 1992 and the plus at is obviously used in a repetitious rhetorical effort at making a list where the second occurrence tops the first.
Inf: mest hvis jeg er forkølet ikke altså hh **plus at**
mostly if I have a cold right you know hh **plus that**

Intv: jo jo jo
yes yes yes

Inf: at til tider kan jeg have et rigtig sømandssprog ikke øh og det bliver
**that at times I may have a real sailor’s language right eh and that will**
selvfølgelig også kommenteret
**of course draw comments**
ha det er ikke altid jeg taler pænest vil jeg sige ha ha ha øh men
**ha it is not always I speak the nicest way I would say ha ha ha eh but**
ikke mobbet nej
**not bullied no**

The interviewer poses a question to the informant about the reactions of interviewee’s surroundings to her language use. The informant’s answer consists of two parts: first, she refers to physical causes (that is, when you have a cold, your nose is blocked and that may draw comments) and second, she focuses on what she seems to take the intended question to be about, viz. her sociolect. She compares it to a generally known stereotypical reference point, “sailor’s language”, presumably meaning a rough male lect; she goes on to contrast it with a “nice” way of speaking and finishes the passage by denying that she has ever been bullied. In this passage, the **plus at** construction, as indeed almost always, introduces the final part of the rhetorical structure. In this particular case, there are only two parts and thus the **plus at** does not have the same weight as it would have with long stretches where it indicates that we have now reached the final part after a long journey through a number of candidates for the role of conclusion.

Already we sense a reason why this construction is not so frequent in interviews and group discussions. It takes a good interviewer to engage the informant to the extent that s/he really takes the floor and uses it for long argumentative passages. It does not happen when interviews consist of answers that are not sequentially structured as consisting of a number of parts and we might even question whether a **plus at** is necessary in this particular case, instead of just using a **men** (‘but’).

In the second example, example 9 from the same interview, a **plus at** is, in fact, the only possible solution to the communicative needs of the informant. The background is as follows: The informant was interviewed in the S1 when she was 19. She was at that time in a relationship with a boy she knew from school and had known for a long time, and lived with him as her partner in a shared apartment. In the S2 interview, it soon turns out that this relationship is over and has been over for quite some time. The passage we are interested in concerns the break-up, which involved the boyfriend finding a new lover while still living with the interviewee in their apartment.
Example 9:
Intv: men blev du ikke alligevel ked af det da han fik en kæreste så hurtigt
but did you not become sorry anyway that he got a girlfriend so quickly
altså eller det er da også øh alligevel lidt underligt
or it it is kind of weird anyway isn’t it
Inf.: hh [suk]
hh [sigh]
nej altså jo både o- øh nej det blev jeg egentlig ikke ked
no or yes both a- eh no actually I did not really mind
af han fik en kæreste øh på den måde fordi altså
that he got a girl friend in that way because
det var jo ligesom oversta˚et og øh der kærestede jeg så også
it was like over and done with and eh I myself flirted a little around with
lidt med med en der der hedder Ole facts øh
someone named Ole actually eh
Intv: nå
well
Inf: men og vi boede jo nærmest bare der og havde
but and we almost just lived there and had
Intv: okay
okay
Inf: fælles adresse men la- lavede ikke ting sammen altså medmindre
the same address but did not do anything together that is unless
det var strengt nødvendigt og når vi var der begge to
it was really necessary and and when we were present both of us
så var det jo bare skænderier altså men det sjove var vi facts stadigvæk
then it was only quarrels but the funny thing was that we actually still 0
vaskede hinandens tøj vi gik på vaskeriet og så men det var der ha
did each other’s laundry we went to the laundromat and then but it was there ha
det var så
it was so
Intv: ha
ha
Inf: men det gjorde vi altså øh og det var lidt det eneste vi til sidst
but that we did right eh and it was a bit like the only thing we finally
havde øh fælles
had in common
Intv: det var den der tøjvask
it was that laundry doing
Inf: ja plus at øh d- det var der var ikke øh de der dybe følelser for ham mere altså
yes plus that eh i- it was there were not those deep emotions for him any longer right

The interviewer asks a question and the informant responds by giving first an aborted attempt at saying both – and, and then self corrects to a straight no, she was not sorry it ended this way while still acknowledging through her use of egentlig (Eng. ‘actually’) that this was a real possibility – as indeed intimated by the interviewer with her use of ikke alligevel (‘not anyway’), i.e. contrary to expected. She proceeds to elaborate the answer with an assemblage of reasons for her not being sorry: (1) she was over him (they were over each other), (2) she had a fling herself with someone new, (3) they were not really a couple any longer, apart from the curious fact of doing each other’s laundry (or doing it together), (4) to top the list with the final plus at argument that she did not have any deep emotions left for him. What happens next is interesting for rhetorical reasons because it seems to deny the rule that the plus at clause always introduces the final part of the rhetorical passage:

Inf: det der gjorde mig ked af det var jo jeg mistede ham som en ven
what made me sad was that I lost him as a friend right
fordi jeg har haft ham hele mit liv altså jeg har kendt ham hele mit liv og
det gjorde mig
because I have had him all my life right I have known him all my life and
that made me

Intv: ja man må da have været bedste venner ikke
yes one must have been best friends right

Inf: det gjorde mig rigtig ked af det altså også fordi vi var jo de bedste venner
that made me really sorry right because we were actually the best of
friends as well right
inden vi så blev kærester ikke
before we became lovers right

Intv: ja
Yes

Thus, the first answer, which was well argued in four parts, was not sufficient. Soul searching herself, the informant must admit that she did indeed feel sorry when they broke up (but not for “love” reasons, rather for reasons of friendship). This very interesting rhetorical structuring of the passage shows that the plus at construction is used completely as it should according to the Nørgård-Sørensen rules but it closes off only the first part of an answer that ends out as manifesting a macro structure of a no-followed-by-a-yes. As the second answer is not internally structured but consists of one argument that is repeated, there is no need for a plus at here.
When we look at the syntax of this passage the plus at clearly introduces a main clause (or a dependent clause with a main clause structure, if you want) complete with a first place and a negation (‘ikke’, eng. not) in the position after the finite verb (var, eng. ‘was’). This takes us back to the argument of how to characterize dependency: in structural, functional or semantic terms. My position is that the plus at introduces an element that is placed as the final proposition in an assemblage, and that the internal structure of the clause is dependent not on the conjunction itself but on the passage as a whole. In this case, the final element is structured as a full-blown assertion.

4. Discussion

4.1 The plus at construction as a challenge to theory

The plus at analysis presented above has made it clear that the construction, although clearly a conjunction, has an unclear syntactic status in traditional terms that it is used for particular rhetorical purposes and that (presumably partly as a consequence) it is a marginal construction that not many of the possible users actually use, at least in the speech events taped during the LANCHART study. We cannot say whether that is a reflection of the actual usage pattern in other speech events as well. In principle, it is always possible to dream up relevant scenarios where the construction could be used, but it is quite another thing to actually document them.

This raises fundamental question for theory. It must be possible to theorize marginal constructions, which are infrequently used by all the members of a speech community or only used by some even though when used they do not seem to lead to misunderstandings. At least the following points need to be addressed: Can we ascribe this construction to the underlying competence of its users, to the competence of the speech community as such, although all its members do not use it, or is the notion of competence less than helpful in this case? Does the construction distinguish users who have it in their productive competency from those who have no problem understanding it, but do not use it themselves? And finally, how do we theorize marginal constructions as such?

4.2 Some notes on the distinction between performance and competence

The notions of performance and competence were introduced by Noam Chomsky in an attempt to forge a new and better dichotomy than the well-worn Saussurean distinction between langue and parole. The locus classicus is as follows:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. To study actual
linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker-hearer is only one. In this respect, study of language is no different from empirical investigation of other complex phenomena. (Chomsky 1965, 3ff.)

Apart from the strange word “primarily”, which potentially restricts the force of the statements following it until we know what else is involved, we note that the focus is on knowledge, tacit knowledge, which is tacitly presupposed to be only one component of language use, the other components being “grammatically irrelevant”. The specific characteristic of the Chomskyan approach is that in stark and conscious contrast to the data-driven (inductive) previous American structuralism, which prominently included his teacher Zellig S. Harris, Chomsky proposed a theory-driven (deductive) approach. This leaves the question of which knowledge the ideal speaker-listener in the heterogeneous speech community actually has, to become a matter for Popperian bold conjectures (Popper 2002). But Popperian bold conjectures are always in need of meticulous testing against the facts and here the idealization of the speaker-hearer in his or her ideal speech community obfuscates the strategy because it introduces a second layer of idealization, separate from the theory. Thus, it is unclear what counts as counterevidence to a claim because the empirical reality is seen as replete with grammatically irrelevant details anyway.

A number of observations may be made on the basis of the above discussion of the plus at construction.

### 4.3 The focus on the individual

With the notion of competence, Noam Chomsky deliberately wished to turn the wheel of history inside linguistics in leaving the social fact of *la langue* and substituting that with the individually centred notion of competence. Insofar as he succeeded, Chomsky laid the foundations of a divide between linguistics and sociolinguistics. Linguistics was to remain focused on the individual, whereas sociolinguists would be concerned with the speech community and consequently such issues as linguistic variation and change.

Taking the plus at construction as the example, I have documented its use and distribution. For me the issue is whether there is an explanation uniting these facts so that the inner workings of the plus at construction, i.e. what its function is, may be linked to its distribution in the speech community. Precisely because this construction is used for specific purposes, some people use it more than others and a lot of speakers may not use it productively at all. Linguistics has to take the complex relationship between individual (linguistic) knowledge and the use of it in social interaction with others as one of its core problems.

One obvious question on the basis of the above is what the interviewers (as opposed to the interviewees) use this construction for if it indeed signals the final element of an assemblage. Interviewers are not supposed to produce long stretches of talk let alone argumentative assemblages. The answer, based on an
analysis of the cases in the LANCHART study, is simple and has a bearing on the focus on the individual competence: the interviewers in all cases either suggest further reasons to be added to an informant’s assemblage or in fact successfully finish an informant’s already produced assemblage, not necessarily of reasons but sometimes just a list of sorts. The difference between the two is that in the first case, the suggestion is disregarded or discarded, whereas in the second case the suggestion is met with the informant’s full approval. Thus, the plus at construction is a paradigmatic example of linguistic competence as communicative (Hymes 1972) or social competence. The interviewer may produce a plus at that actually “belongs” in the informant’s passage precisely because it is part of their shared norm. The plus at is a clear case of social, shared knowledge, present in the interviewer’s linguistic output because s/he is able to add to an informant’s production what he or she might have produced him- or herself.

4.4 The asymmetry of production and comprehension

Very few of the total number of informants (but quite a few of the interviewers) produce the plus at construction, and its distribution is severely skewed in the data sets. It is essential for the argument here that there are no indications in any case I am aware of, of misunderstandings in the recordings or lack of comprehension of this particular construction, and yet it must be the case that some of the participating individuals never produce any plus at. Hence, we may conclude that the plus at is present in the Danish speech community as part of the comprehension competence of participants, but that the construction does not necessarily figure in the productive competence of all the same individuals. It does in some, but we have no reason to believe that it is there in all Danish speakers’ individual productive competence, and hence by implication this construction can only in a very special sense be said to belong to the “system of Danish”. To talk of a new Danish conjunction would seem to imply that this construction would be part of the competence of any speaker of Danish and that cannot be the case. Both the notion of “an ideal speaker-hearer” and the idea of “a Danish system of conjunctions” may thus make the asymmetry of language production and comprehension harder to grasp. But this asymmetry is arguably fundamental to the phenomenon of variation because it allows us to understand what we do not necessarily produce ourselves.

A distinct possibility is that those language users who do not produce any plus at constructions make use of other means to reach the same end. This possibility entails the delimitation of a function, much like the one described above, and furthermore, a set of other ways to fulfil it than the plus at construction. In written language it is easy to come up with a list of candidates: ydermere ‘furthermore’, the clause hertil kommer ‘add to this’ and possibly a few more might feature on it. In spoken language, cf. above p. 7, it is not clear what the relevant paradigmatic set is and, partly for that reason, I have not investigated whether the non-users of
the *plus at* use such alternative lexical elements or, which is a plausible alternative, they do not produce assemblages at all.

Summarizing the endeavour so far, we conclude that the inclusion of *plus at* into a description of the system of Danish is no trivial matter. *Plus at* is a complex conjunction and thus has to be part of a conjunctural system. It seems to play the part of a paratactic conjunction, which is strictly used in longer passages, predominantly of talk, on the condition that preceding it is any number of rhetorical elements that form a list or an assemblage in that they have something in common. The *plus at* then introduces the final element. If we take note of the skewed distribution in the speech community, some individuals, arguably a minority, have this particular conjunction as part of their productive competence; others, a sizeable majority, only have it as part of their competence for comprehension. There is no escaping the conclusion that either there are different competencies in the speech community as a whole, or we have to differentiate in general between competence of production and competence for comprehension. Finally, the construction is in any case marginal, and this should be included in any description of both types of competence.

### 4.5 Marginality

What do we mean when we say that a construction is marginal? We mean that there are rules of grammar and types of constructions, which are as follows:

- acquired early and used every day, for some of them in every utterance we make,
- productive in the sense that every new construction has to be fitted into the frame.

Such rules and constructions belong in the core grammar.

On the other hand, there are rules and constructions, which are as follows:

- acquired late if at all,
- rarely used and only in specialized speech events or contexts,
- non-productive in the sense that they are isolates and/or never are treated as the basis for analogies or extensions.

Such rules and constructions have to be treated as belonging to the peripheral grammar. Obvious cases are the grammars of amateur songs or diaries that have special features (in the first case, archaic structures of word order; in the second the almost obligatory omission of the first person subject), which create severe problems for the core grammar if they have to be incorporated in it.

### 4.6 Innovation?

Is this an innovation? The simple answer is we do not know. I take the virtual nonappearance (only one example) in the early recordings of Mette Mortensen
from 1970 as admittedly weak, corroborating evidence and the lack of notice in the ODS as further evidence to the same end, but we would have to search much more for passages e.g. in the old dialect recordings, where it would have been “natural” to use this particular construction given its present distribution and to show that it did not occur there, in order to substantiate fully a claim of innovation.

Note that the problem is akin to the problem of a non-occurrence in corpora taken as evidence of impossibility, equivalent to e.g. “ungrammatical”. Everyone agrees that this is a non-sequitur. But so far the problem stays with us because we cannot devise any method of circumventing it unless we define clearly the context where the construction under investigation is necessary and in addition invent field methods of eliciting this context.

Despite differences between the spoken and the written modes, the apparently parallel developments in time of this construction within spoken and written language are suggestive: Nørgård-Sørensen (2001) and Julien (2009) both adduce evidence that the construction is relatively new (although apparently older in Swedish than in Danish; Julien 2009, 124–28) and Hansen and Heltoft in their new Grammar of Danish (2011) explicitly state that the plus at construction has arisen in nyere tid (“in the present period”) (Hansen and Heltoft 2011: 1554). These authors all work primarily with written data.

From a functional point of view, this is interesting: Why has it been necessary in a certain period of the existence of Danish in both its modes to develop and to replicate a plus at construction? What historical communication processes have made this particular demand on language structure?

By posing this final question I close my contribution to celebrate a Danish linguist for whom the most fundamental questions of language modes and language functions are a constant challenge.

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Note on contributor

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