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Changes to traditional family structure as reflected in the Danish language

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Introduction

The status of the nuclear family, once accepted as the only possible family form, is changing rapidly across many European countries. This is also true of Denmark where the topic has received great interest from scholars representing different scientific fields, ranging from anthropology (Mogensen, Olwig 2013) and historical studies (Christoffersen 2004, Løkke, Jacobsen 2009, Lützen 2013) through sociology (Ottosen et al. 2010, Munk 2018) and pedagogy (Grumløse, Marschall 2018). However, although the available research provides an in-depth understanding of the changes which the Danish society has undergone in the last few decades, it does not fully reveal the extent to which these changes have become rooted in the mentality of the Danes. The present study seeks to fill this void by using one of the most efficient tools for bringing out the conceptualizations shared by a given community – that of language. More specifically, the article aims to:

- investigate the status of the notion of nuclear family in Denmark in the light of commonly used words and expressions;
- verify how and to what extent the new family forms are reflected in the system of the Danish language;
- demonstrate the current tendencies in the conceptualization of nuclear family in Danish discourse.

In the light of the above, the study should provide a fairly representative picture of the concept of FAMILY in Denmark, as well as establish the extent

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to which alternative family models have found their way into the Danish language.

Theoretical considerations and material

The present study rests on the assumption that language plays a primary role in “cultural accumulation and historical transmission” (Sapir 1949: 18), and reflects the way a given community perceives the surrounding reality:

Every language contains terms that have come to attain cosmic scope of reference, that crystallize in themselves the basic postulates of an unformulated philosophy, in which is couched the thought of a people, a culture, a civilization, even of an era” (Whorf 1956: 61)

This, in turn, leads us to the conclusion which serves as the foundation of the modern-day ethnolinguistic studies – language can be used as a key to uncover the content of different cultures. What we shall pursue in the following is an examination of the linguistic worldview of the Danes, understood as

(...) language-entrenched interpretation of reality, which can be expressed in the form of judgments about the world, people, things, events. It is an interpretation, not a reflection; it is a portrait without claims to fidelity, not a photograph of real object. The interpretation is a result of subjective perception and conceptualization of reality performed by the speakers of a given language; thus, it is clearly subjective and anthropocentric but also intersubjective (social). It unites people in a given social environment, creates a community of thoughts, feelings and values. It influences (to what extent is a matter for discussion) the perception and understanding of the social situation by a member of the community. (Bartmiński 2009: 23)

In the past three decades, the study of linguistic worldviews and the interplay between language and culture has garnered much interest (Bartmiński 2012: 11), not only in the Slavic ethnolinguistic circles but also among linguists such as Anna Wierzbicka (1997) or James Underhill (2009, 2012). From the methodological standpoint, it has gradually opened up to new sources of data, such as texts or questionnaires (see Underhill 2012, Bartmiński 2018a), which has allowed for more nuanced and actual analyses of concepts in question. The systemic data of a given language is always a step or two behind the current values shared by the linguistic community speaking this language, as it takes time before the most recent ways of

conceptualizing the surrounding reality become solidly entrenched in the form of fixed expressions or lexemes registered by dictionaries.

The above considerations are reflected in the material collected for the purpose of the present study as well as in the design of the study. In the following two sections (3 and 4), we will respectively discuss the notion of nuclear family as well as the alternative forms of being a family, in the light of dictionary sources and corpus data. With regard to the former, we will derive data from the most comprehensive dictionary of the Danish language “Den Danske Ordbog” (DDO) that describes the vocabulary of modern Danish on the basis of a large text corpus. Outside of lexical definitions, it also provides information about etymology, related words and phrases, grammatical properties, most common collocations, as well as examples from the corpus, and the search engine in the online version of DDO enables the researcher to easily find and access the derivatives and compounds involving the lexeme in question. As for the other source of systemic data, the present study makes use of the online corpus of the Danish language referred to as *Korpus.dk* which contains 56 million words derived from texts coming from the period between ca. 1990 and 2000.

Pursuing to capture the most recent picture of the Danish notion of nuclear family as well as the challenges that it has been facing, section 5 will employ a new source of linguistic data – a corpus of 50 texts from the period of 2010-2020 collected online and gathered by using keywords such as *alenefar* ‘lone father’, *alenemor* ‘lone mother’, *traditionelle familiemønstre* ‘traditional family patterns’, or *kernefamilie* ‘nuclear family’ in the Google search engine, which allowed to find texts that were most relevant in the context of the present study. This should allow us to depict the changes which Danish society has undergone in the recent decades and to demonstrate how the different family forms are perceived and discussed in Denmark. Finally, confronting all three parts of the analysis and the sources of linguistic data that they employ, section 6 will provide a reflection on the received results, as well as perspectives for further research.

Nuclear family in the light of systemic data

The analysis’ point of departure is the lexical definition of the word *familie* ‘family’ as included in DDO. In the present context, it is the first sense and the two related sub-senses that require a deeper insight²:

² The dictionary also provides a second sense in which the word refers to a group of plants or animals connected by common traits.

1. gruppe af personer bestående af et forældrepar og deres børn typisk boende samme sted; ofte set i forhold til et enkelt af familiens medlemmer 'a group of people consisting of two parents and their children that typically live in the same place; often in reference to one of the members of the family';

1.a gruppe af (nulevende) personer der er forbundne gennem slægtskab, ægteskab eller adoption især set i forhold til et enkelt af familiens medlemmer 'a group of (currently living) people who are tied by kinship, marriage, or adoption; especially in reference to one of the members of the family';

1.b gruppe af personer der føler samhørighed eller deler et interessefællesskab; genstande med ét eller flere træk eller egenskaber til fælles 'a group of people who feel tied with each other or share the same interests; objects with one or more common characteristics'³.

As we can see, even though DDO is the most comprehensive and pertinent- Danish dictionary, regularly updated, and one which reflects the current meaning of words considerably well, the first and most basic sense of the word *familie* 'family' is still explained as a group of people consisting of two parents and their children living together, providing the first indication that that the traditional notion of nuclear family still has roots that run deep in the Danish society. Only in the derived sense (1.a) which focuses primarily on the types of relations that may exist between the people within a family, we encounter information indicating that the current reality may be more complex, namely the mention that family ties may also embrace adoption. Nevertheless, in the light of the definition provided by DDO, it seems that a family consisting of two parents and their children still is the prototype in the Danish society.

Some more information about the traditional family model can be found in the derivatives and compounds registered by the dictionary. First and foremost, families have a certain structure (*familiestruktur* 'family structure'), with a special place reserved to the nuclear family structure (*kernefamiliestruktur* 'nuclear family structure') and the youngest members of the family (*børnefamilie* 'family with children', *småbørnsfamilie*). The structure, of course, does not only embrace the parents and their children but spans over many more kin relations, for example grandparents (*bedsteforældre* 'grandparents', *morfar* 'lit. mother's father', *mormor* 'lit. mother's mother', *farfar* 'lit. father's father', *farmor* 'lit. father's mother'), uncles and aunts (*onkel* 'uncle', *tante* 'aunt', *morbror* 'maternal uncle', *farbror* 'paternal uncle', *moster* 'maternal aunt', *faster* 'paternal aunt'), or in-laws

³ ?????

(*svigerforældre* ‘parents-in-law’, *svigermor* ‘mother-in-law’, *svigerfar* ‘father-in-law’, *svigersøster* ‘sister-in-law’, *svigerbror* ‘brother-in-law’). Perhaps the most interesting from our standpoint, however, is the valuing of the notion of FAMILY in general, and of nuclear family in particular, that can be concluded on the basis of several compounds formed using the word *familie* ‘family’. While the lexeme *storfamilie* ‘three (or more) generation family’ definitely no longer reflects the typical scenario, having a big family (*en stor familie* ‘a big family’) still seems to be something that receives positive valuing⁴. This is easily understandable in the light of other compounds registered by DDO which all evoke a feeling of COZINESS, SERENITY, JOY, and HAPPINESS (*familiehygge* ‘family cosiness’⁵, *familiesammenkomst* ‘family reunion’, *familiefest* ‘family party’, *familiekomsammen* ‘family gathering’, *familiemenneske* ‘family man’, *familieliv* ‘family life’, *familieudflugt* ‘family outing’). Particularly worth highlighting is the word *familieidyl* that, outside of profiling the above-mentioned positive aspects of family life, demonstrates the amount of idealization to which the notion of nuclear family has been subjected over the years.

This picture continues when we consider the most frequent patterns provided by DDO, particularly *hjemme hos/i familien* ‘at home with one’s family’, *hjem til familien* ‘(going) home to one’s family’ that, outside of involving aspects such as SENSE OF SECURITY, LONGING, and COZINESS, also allow us to observe that the notion of nuclear family is inextricably connected with the concept of HOME⁶ (about the concept of home in European languages cf. Bartmiński 2015). The expression *børnerige familier* ‘large family, lit. family rich in children’, in turn, once again highlights the special place that having a big family with several children has had in the Danish culture.

⁴ It is important to note the difference between the compound *storfamilie* that refers exclusively to the concept of the family living together in one place, and the nominal phrase *en stor familie* that occurs highly frequently in the corpus and that means ‘a big family’.

⁵ The concept of HYGGE (represented mainly by the verb *at hygge sig*, the noun *hygge*, and the adjective *hyggelig*) is regarded as one of the key cultural concepts functioning in the Danish language. It refers to a place and to the people in this place and means roughly ‘cosiness, warmth, and relaxed, safe atmosphere’. A highly detailed and successful analysis of the lexeme *hygge* can be found in Carsten Levisen’s ‘Cultural Semantics and Social Cognition. A Case Study on the Danish Universe of Meaning’ (2012).

⁶ The concept of HOME in European languages, as well as the ties between the concepts of FAMILY and HOME are best described in the first volume of ‘The Axiological Lexicon of Slavs and Their Neighbours’ (Bartmiński et al. 2015, Bartmiński 2018b for English version).

Some additional insight is provided by the corpus where many of the most frequently occurring expressions refer to the notion of nuclear family and convey an idealized picture thereof. Firstly, in the light of the gathered corpus material, we can conclude that the Danish concept of FAMILY is partially understood in terms of typical cases (*traditionel familie* ‘traditional family’, *almindelig / normal familie* ‘regular / normal family’, *typisk familie* ‘typical family’), and a deeper look into the contexts in which the above-mentioned phrases occur allows to establish that they most often refer to the nuclear family model. For example, the phrase *typisk familie* co-occurs with contexts such as *med et par / to børn* ‘with a couple of / two children’, *på fire medlemmer* ‘with four members’, or *der bygges nyt hus* ‘that is building a new house’, and a similar situation can be observed in the case of the phrase *almindelig familie*, e.g. *med børn* ‘with children’, or *med far og mor* ‘with a father and a mother’. With regard to the size of the typical family, we can see that it most commonly involves two parents and two children, but there is also an awareness of the existence of larger families (*stor familie* ‘large family’), as well as smaller families (*lille familie* ‘little family’). Regardless of the size, however, a special place is reserved for the closest members of one’s family (*nær / nærmest familie* ‘close / closest family’).

Outside of the typical case described above, there also exists a certain ideal of what a family should be – a phenomenon already signaled in the previous paragraphs. And thus, we once again encounter aspects such as SENSE OF SECURITY (*familie (sikkerhed) og tryghed* ‘family (security) and sense of security’, *fredsfuldt familie* ‘peaceful family’, and HAPPINESS (*glad / lykkelig familie* ‘glad / happy family’) which we now can also complement with LOVE (*elskende familie / forældre* ‘loving family / parents’, and WARMTH (*varm familie* ‘warm family’). A family that involves all the above-mentioned elements, can be described as PERFECT (*perfekt familie* ‘perfect family’, TRUE (*rigtig familie* ‘right / true family’, WELL-FUNCTIONING (*vevfungerende familie* ‘well-functioning family’), or HEALTHY (*sund familie* ‘healthy family’). What is highly important, regardless of whether the typical or an ideal case is in question, families are very often perceived as a whole, as seen in the expression *hele familien* which stands for around 18% of all the phrases in the corpus involving the word *familie*.

Nevertheless, some of the above-mentioned collocations allow us for the first time to capture the other side of the coin as well; as they, in some contexts, may sound either rather ironic or naive (cf. *perfekt familie* ‘perfect family’, *sund familie* ‘healthy family’). This is because they refer to an ideal which may seem unachievable for many, and that does not fit the current reality very well. In this light we can better understand the rather pejorative

or ironic collocations such as *drømme / fantasere om en lykkelig familie + billed(et)/idealbillede af en lykkelig familie* ‘a picture of / an ideal picture of a happy family’, or *fortælling om en dejlig familie* ‘story / narrative about a fantastic family’. Moreover, expressions such as *alternative familieformer* ‘alternative family forms’ demonstrate clearly that the nuclear family is not the only family model functioning in today’s Denmark. For the first time we also become aware of the fact that the notion of nuclear family is not only being challenged by other family forms, but may even be treated with a dose of reservation or sarcasm (*borgerlig kernefamilie* ‘traditional nuclear family’). Following these indications, it seems justified to shift our focus and investigate the extent to which the system of the Danish language also reflects other perspectives on the concept of FAMILY in Denmark, and what alternative forms of living together as a family it distinguishes.

Challenges to the traditional family model

Thus, we have already seen indications that there may exist some challenges to the traditional family model consisting of two parents and two or more children, and that the linguistically and culturally entrenched ideal of a large and happy family has been subjected to revision. In what follows, we will address the two main threads that have emerged from the preceding analysis – i.e. the valuing of the traditional family model, and the existence of alternative family forms.

To begin with the former task, it is rather uncontroversial to say that having a big and loving family is still something that most Danes value highly. This, however, does not necessarily pertain to the so-called traditional family model perceived as a social construct, as seen in the expression *det traditionelle familiemønste* ‘the traditional family patterns’ that nowadays may evoke rather negative connotations. This happens first and foremost due to the changes that the Danish society has undergone in the last 50 years, with gender parity and the idea of an open labor market being the two major factors. The traditional division between men and women has changed radically, and so has the internal structure of the Danish family. Outside of the already mentioned expression *det traditionelle familiemønste*, we can see it in other phrases provided by DDO as well, for example *familiens overhoved* ‘head of the family’ or *husmor* ‘housewife’ that sound outdated and evoke associations with the unequivocally negatively valued patriarchal social structure. Likewise, there are increasingly less situations in which the phrase *hjemmegående hustru / husmor* ‘(full-time) housewife’ is needed, and there is no more need for the adjective

arbejdende to complement the noun *mor*, indicating that a home-bound MOTHER-HOUSEWIFE is no longer the prototype in the Danish society. In the context of other European countries, it is worth observing that the family structure in Denmark is also influenced by the fact that Danish children are generally quick to leave home and start a life of their own (and are expected to do so, as seen in expressions such as *klippe navlestrengen* ‘cut the umbilical cord’, *hænge i mors skorter* ‘lit. to hang in mother’s skirts’, *helikopterforældre* ‘helicopter parents’), which is made possible by the social system that amortizes the impact of the change.

The changes in the Danish society have also resulted in the emergence of alternative family models, challenging the monopoly of the nuclear family. This can be concluded also in the light of several expressions occurring in the corpus of Danish language, such as *den ændrede familiestruktur* ‘the changed family structure’, *forskellige familiestrukturer* ‘different family structures’, *andre familieformer* ‘other family forms’, *ny / ændret familiemønster* ‘new / changed family pattern’, *familiemønsters er i opbrud* ‘family patterns are falling apart’, but also in the mere existence (and high frequency) of the plural forms of the words *familieform* ‘family form’, *familiemodel* ‘family model’, and *familiemønster* ‘family pattern’. The new, complex reality is also reflected in DDO, where the words *familiestruktur* and *familieform* are both defined as “a way in which a family is built, e.g. a nuclear family, a lone parent, or a blended family”, mentioning the nuclear family model merely as only one possible alternative. Worth mentioning in this contexts are also the text examples provided by the dictionary in order to demonstrate the use of the above-mentioned words in context:

- (1) En af de hyppigste familieformer er den enlige mor med børn. ‘One of the most frequent family forms is the lone mother with children.’ (Politiken 2012)
- (2) alle de såkaldt nye familieformer er lige så meget familier som den traditionelle kernefamilie. ‘all the so-called new family forms are families to the same extent as the traditional nuclear family is.’ (Politiken 2016)
- (3) i dag bliver de færreste set ned på, hvis de vælger en familiestruktur, der eksperimenterer med den gængse form ‘today there are few who are looked down upon if they choose a family form that experiments with the most common form.’ (Berlingske Tidende 2010)

In the light of the above, we can conclude that there exist several different family forms in Denmark, and that they are widely accepted in the Danish society. Now, let us investigate what alternatives there are to the

traditional family model, and to what extent they have found their way into the Danish language. First and foremost, several of the collected expressions point to the fact that most of the alternative ways of being a family exist because one's initial family structure did not function optimally and has been broken up (*splittet familie* 'divided family', *brudt familie* 'broken family'). The main culprit in this context are definitely divorces that occur rather frequently in Denmark, as reflected in the data gathered from Statistics Denmark⁷, as well as a group of linguistic expressions registered by the DDO and Korpus.dk (*skilsmissebarn* 'child of divorced parents', *skilsmisseforælder* 'divorced parent', *bopælsforælder* 'the parent with whom the child lives after the divorce', *samværsforælder* 'the parent with whom the child does not live after the divorce, but who has the legal right to see the child', *weekendmor / -far* 'a divorced mother / father who can see their child or children during the weekends', *fraskilte forældre* 'divorced parents', *skilt familie* 'divided family'). As a result, there exist different family forms, e.g. families consisting of a lone parent and their child / children (*eneforælder* 'lone parent', *alenemor / -far*, *enlig mor / -far* 'lone mother / father', *singlemor / -far* 'single mother / father', *solomor* 'lone mother'), or formed by people who already have children from previous relationships (*bonusmor / -far*, *stedfar / mor*, *plasticfar / -mor*, *papfar / mor* 'all stepfather / -mother', *bonusfamilie*, *stedefamilie*, *plasticfamilie* 'stepfamily'). Of course, however, divorce is not the only factor that has contributed to the existence of the great variety of different family models. Worth mentioning in connection to this is for example the idea of a supporting family which helps the original biological family by taking care of their challenged child or children in a certain period of time (*støttefamilie*, *aflastningsfamilie*), or adoptive families that raise children whose biological parents are not present (*plejebarn / familie* ' + *adoptivforældre / -far / -mor / -barn*). Particularly interesting in the context of the current reality are also the expressions referring to homosexual parent families that have emerged in the last two decades (*regnbuefamilie* 'rainbow family', *regnbuebarn* 'rainbow child', *medforælder* 'in the second sense of the word: a homosexual stepparent').

Based on all the above described phenomena, we can derive several interesting conclusions. First and foremost, nearly all the above cited expressions have neutral or even positive connotations⁸, proving that there

⁷ According to the DST (Statistics Denmark), in 2020 the divorce rate lay at 48%. Source: <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/husstande-familier-og-boern/skilsmisser>.

⁸ Most notably by virtue of the first part of the compound, e.g. *solo-* 'solo', *bonus*

not only exists an awareness of there being various alternative forms of being a family but also a wide acceptance thereof. The only two exceptions that we encounter in the gathered material are the compounds formed with the rather negatively-laden nouns *plastic* ‘plastic’, and *pap* ‘cardboard’ that are used to refer to stepfamilies. It seems that this family model has still not been able to shake off all the negative associations that were ascribed to it in the past. Secondly, a closer look into the Danish language structures also confirms that there exists a well-established legal framework dedicated to recognizing and supporting of alternative family forms. In other words, the different life situations described above are not only accepted by the society, but acknowledged by the state as well. Thirdly, what is interesting, one of the above-mentioned forms – *solomor* ‘solo mother’ – does not have its male counterpart registered by the dictionary, even though the expression *solofar* ‘solo father’ is sometimes used by the speakers of Danish, as reflected in the Google search engine results. This triggers the question of whether one perceives and depicts the two seemingly equivalent roles differently, as it is the case with motherly and fatherly love that are partially based on different models and are profiled differently in the Danish discourse (Kacprzak 2021: 108)⁹.

In order to summarize the last two sections of the article, we need to acknowledge that the dictionary and the corpus most probably still feature the nuclear family as the prototype, but the current section demonstrates rather clearly that the system of Danish language has simultaneously succeeded in capturing the diversity of family forms in existence nowadays. Moreover, on the basis of the collected linguistic material, we could conclude that the alternative family forms in Denmark are normally met with a non-condescending, accepting approach. Now it is time for us to confront the systemic data with the perspectives present in the Danish discourse, in order to see whether the picture reflected in the most ossified expressions is up to date with the most recent developments in the Danish society.

Nuclear family in Danish discourse

The state of the nuclear family model is a rather popular topic in the Danish discourse, with most articles being centered around the changes to the traditional social structure and the decline of the model. The most important ‘bonus’, or *regnbue*- ‘rainbow’.

⁹ The question seems even more reasonable to be posed in the light of the literature concerning the valuing of solo mothers and fathers in other European countries, e.g. in the Czech Republic (Filipowicz 2021), or Sweden (Bergnehr, Henriksson 2020).

conclusion is that, regardless of the ideological profile of the media outlet in question, the vast majority of the collected articles agree as to the fact that the nuclear family is losing its dominant position in Denmark. In other words, the adversity that the nuclear family model is facing is being treated as a fact rather than as something one could contest:

(4) Kernefamilien skal nok overleve. Men set i et historisk perspektiv er familien og ægteskabet mere truet end tidligere. 'The nuclear family will survive. But seen from the historical perspective, family and marriage are threatened more than at any other time in the past' (Rikke Struck Westersø: *Derfor bliver vi ikke gift*, bt.dk, 19 VIII 2012)

(5) Kernefamilien i opbrud – solomødre er den nye normal 'The nuclear family is falling apart – solo mothers are the new normal' (Friederike Naja Felbo: *Kernefamilien i opbrud – solomødre er den nye normal*, tv2.dk, 31 VII 2016)

(6) Det er blevet okay at være enlig forsørger, de homoseksuelle får rettigheder på linje med alle andre, mens især kvinderne vælger parforholdet fra. En stille revolution af begrebet »familie« er i gang. 'It has become OK to be a lone parent, homosexual persons have equal rights just as all other people, and especially women consciously choose not to be in any kind of love-relationship. The term "family" is going through a quiet revolution.' (Line Holm Nielsen: *Kernefamilien under pres*, berlingske.dk, 9 V 2013)

The first of the three examples (4) in fact seems to bring rather uplifting news – the nuclear family shall survive. However, the answer presupposes a question of whether the traditional family model will exist at all in the future, which, combined with the statement included in the second sentence (*er familien og ægteskabet mere truet end tidligere* 'family and marriage are threatened more than at any other time in the past'), gives the reader an impression that the nuclear family in Denmark is under serious pressure. The two following examples, on the other hand, provide a more detailed insight into the alternative family forms that have contributed to breaking the monopoly of the notion of nuclear family. Here it is particularly worth observing that in both articles, both homosexual families and solo mothers are described in a neutral or even slightly positive fashion, while the people who oppose the current development are depicted as prejudiced and primitive:

(7) For der vil selvfølgelig være mange, der har fordomme. 'Because there will, of course, be many who are prejudiced' (Friederike Naja Felbo: *Kernefamilien i opbrud – solomødre er den nye normal*, tv2.dk, 31 VII 2016)

(8) »Hvad bliver det næste,« spurgte Dansk Folkepartis familieordfører i den anledning, »at vi kan gifte os med dyr?« '»What is next«, asked Danish People's Party's spokesperson in the area of family, »that we are going to marry animals?«' (Line Holm Nielsen: *Kernefamilien under pres*, berlingske.dk, 9 V 2013)

Thus, in the above mentioned cases we have come across two clearly discernible tendencies that occur throughout all of the texts assembled for the purpose of the present study. Firstly, hardly anyone would deny the fact that the nuclear family model is under pressure. Secondly, the new family forms are described in a neutral or even positive way. This, however, does not mean that all the articles take a neutral stance in connection with the notion of nuclear family. As seen in the two following examples, the more leftist-oriented media outlets such as "Politiken" or "Information" describe it in rather negative terms, encouraging the readers to revise traditional views:

(9) Lad os gøre op med idealet om kernefamilien. 'Let us get rid of the ideal of the nuclear family.' (Pouline Middleton: *Lad os gøre op med idealet om kernefamilien*, politiken.dk, 23 III 2016)

(10) Hvis ægteskabet er et samfundsideal, der symboliserer kernefamiliens suverænitæt, kan man overveje, om det er hensigtsmæssigt, eftersom stadig flere børn vokser op i anderledes familiekonstruktioner – regnbuefamilier eller i familier, der udgøres af mor og barn. 'If marriage is a social ideal that symbolizes the sovereignty of the nuclear family, one can wonder whether this is appropriate, as more and more children grow up in different family constructions – rainbow families or families that consist of a mother and her child' (Kathrine Sekjær: *Vil du (ikke) giftes?*, information.dk, 15 V 2015)

Interestingly enough, both of the cited examples refer to the family ideal which we have uncovered in our analysis of the most ossified linguistic expressions, indicating that the ideal is still present in broader layers of the Danish society. As argued in both articles, this ideal should be revised, particularly as something that leads to the discrimination of other family forms. In another article published in "Information" and focusing on the current state of the traditional family model, we can see that the negative valuing thereof, as well as of its proponents, may sometimes be very prominent if examined from the linguistic point of view:

(11) En del lande har også legaliseret ægteskab mellem personer af samme køn, der også kan vælge at stifte familie, uanset at sådanne familier vækker mishag hos Frans og el-Tayeb, der næppe ser dem som institutioner for »solid moralsk dannelse«. Singlekvinder, der får børn ved kunstig insemination, er en yderligere trend, som foruroliger den traditionelle familieforsvarere. 'Several countries have also legalized marriage between people of the same sex, who can choose to start a family regardless of the fact that such families are displeasing to Francis and el-Tayeb who hardly see them as institutions providing »solid moral education«. Single women who have children via artificial insemination are another trend that raises concerns of the defenders of the traditional family.' (Peter Singer: *Peter Singer: Den traditionelle familie har mistet sin moralske forrang*, 26 III 2019).

In the light of several emotionally-laden and ironic expressions such as *vækker mishag* 'are displeasing', *der næppe ser dem som institutioner for »solid moralsk dannelse«* 'who hardly see them as institutions providing a »solid moral education«, or *som foruroliger den traditionelle familieforsvarere* 'that raises concerns of the defenders of the traditional family', where the sarcastic tone is amplified by the use of the genitive form, we can observe the same tendency to create an opposition between the bigoted proponents of the nuclear family model and the rest of the society that accepts the alternative family forms, as we have seen in examples (7) and (8). Additionally, in the leftist-oriented discourse the notion of nuclear family can be seen as a major factor in maintaining the traditional gender roles and contributing to the oppression of women:

(12) I dag er det normer og forventninger til 'det gode liv', der kan diktere roller i et heteroseksuelt parforhold og i kernefamilien. Normer, der indebærer kønsroller, der stadig ikke er brudt med. Især for mandens rolle som omsorgsgiver og familiefar. Normer for maskulinitet fastholder ham i rollen som 'skaffedyr' for familien. 'Nowadays it is the norms and expectations about "the good life" that can dictate roles in a heterosexual relationship or in the nuclear family. Norms that presuppose gender roles that we still have not gotten rid of. Particularly when it comes to the man's role as the caretaker and the father of the family.' (Solve Storm Falkenberg: *Parterapeuter, der går ukritisk til kønsroller, fastholder patriarkalske magtstrukturer*, information.dk, 3 III 2020).

However, not everyone shares the same negative valuing of the notion of nuclear family – quite the contrary, as reflected in texts sourced from the more conservative newspaper "Berlingske", or the Christian "Kristeligt Dagblad":

(13) Men sådan her ser det ud: det har negative omkostninger for børn at opleve familiebrud. Allerede i 3-års-alderen er småbørn af enlige forsørgere på flere områder dårligere stillet end jævnaldrende børn i kernefamilier. 'But it has looked this way: it has negative consequences for children to experience a family break-up. Already at the age of 3 children of lone parents are in a worse position in many areas when compared to their peers brought up in nuclear families.' (Mai Heide Ottosen: *Børn i kernefamilien er bedst beskyttet*, berlingske.dk, 29 IX 2010)

(14) Alligevel står parforholdet og kernefamilien stadig som ideal for mange. Og noget kunne tyde på, at vi efter årtier med fokus på frigørelse og selvrealisering netop er blevet mere optaget af tidligere tiders traditionelle dyder og nærmest længes efter fastere rammer og stabilitet. 'Nevertheless, the love-relationship and nuclear family is still an ideal for many. And there are some indications that we, after a long period of focusing on liberation and self-realization, have become more interested in the traditional values of the past and nearly long after a more structured life and stability.' (Bjerg Tulinus: *Ny undersøgelse: De unge vil have kernefamilie og forpligtelser*, kristeligt-dagblad.dk, 18 VII 2019)

Both articles published in conservative newspapers include references to scientific studies – the first one demonstrating that the nuclear family model is optimal for the well-being of children, and the second indicating that the young Danes may want to go back to the traditional family model – and are rather neutral in tone, although in (14) we can distinguish an attempt to equate the nuclear family with SECURITY and STABILITY (*faste rammer og stabilitet* 'a more structured life and stability'). Highly interestingly, in one of the articles, the scientist sharing her research refers to the already mentioned opposition created by the opponents of the nuclear family model and describes the results of her study as 'inconvenient' (*ubekvent* 'inconvenient') because she does not want to fall into the category of *kernefamiliefascister* 'nuclear family fascists':

»Resultatet er ubekvent for os forskere, fordi vi nødigt vil tages til indtægt for at være kernefamiliefascister,« skriver Mai Heide Ottosen. Prisen for den valgfrihed, som voksne har til at danne og droppe familierelationer, kan ende med at blive betalt af vores børn. 'The results are inconvenient for us researchers because we do not want to be cited as »nuclear family fascists,« writes Mai Heide Ottosen. The price of the freedom of choice which the adults have to start and abandon family relations can end up as something that their children have to pay. ' (Mai Heide Ottosen: *Børn i kernefamilien er bedst beskyttet*, berlingske.dk, 29 IX 2010)

In this light we can conclude that the narrative about the nuclear family is, at least to some extent, controlled by its opponents, and that people who support it are in a rather disadvantageous position in the public discourse.

In summary, when comparing with to the first two parts of the analysis and the worldview ossified in the system of Danish language, the analyzed contemporary texts prove that there still exists an ideal of nuclear family recognized by broad layers of the Danish society, but the valuing of this ideal in discourse varies dependent on the ideological profile of the media outlet in question. What does not differ, in turn, is the wide acceptance of the alternative family forms, including solo mothers and homosexual couples, as well as the awareness of the nuclear family being under pressure. In addition to the above observations, in the light of the collected textual material, we can also pose the question as to what extent nuclear family should be treated as the typical case of the concept of FAMILY in Denmark, and if so, whether this will be the case in the near future.

Summary

The above analysis allowed us to delve into several aspects of a highly important sphere of the Danish worldview, that is the concept of FAMILY, and investigate the dynamics between the traditional notion of nuclear family and the new family forms that have emerged and flourished in the last couple of decades. The most important conclusion from the first part of the analysis which dealt with dictionary and corpus data, is that the nuclear family can still be treated as a linguistically entrenched ideal, while the second part of the study, based on a corpus of 50 texts from contemporary Danish discourse, demonstrated that this ideal is currently being revised, and that the nuclear family model is quickly losing ground to other family forms. In addition, the study has also allowed us to highlight the open and non-discriminating character of the Danish language with regard to alternative family models such as lone parents and homosexual couples, which is reflected in both the most entrenched linguistic expressions and the current discourse. Moreover, as demonstrated by way of analysis of the collected texts, the public debate in Denmark seems to have entered a second stage where it is the proponents of the nuclear family model who, by default, have to defend their position.

The conducted study also provides us with an opportunity to make several observations from the theoretical and methodological standpoint. First and foremost, in the light of the above analysis, we need to stress the importance of including more up-to-date sets of linguistic data, as opposed to considering solely the most ossified forms and expressions. What

may prove sufficient with regard to the greater linguistic categories such as TIME or SPACE is rather only a starting point in the case of the more dynamically developing spheres of our worldviews such as axiology. In our context, it was only upon confronting the most linguistically entrenched forms with texts from Danish discourse that we could get a sense of the variety of the different points of view which function in connection with the notion of FAMILY in Denmark as well as capture the tendency to revise the ideals of the past. As seen in the “Axiological Lexicon of Slavs and Their Neighbours” (Bartmiński 2018a), or the research carried out by James Underhill (2009, 2011, 2012), ethnolinguistics has clearly entered a stage of its development where it seeks to go beyond the most petrified conceptualizations and embraces the creative and individual in order to provide the fullest and most actual description of the analyzed worldview possible. This is understandable once we assume that the general framework of any language is only a starting point for its speakers who choose from a pool of different linguistically and culturally entrenched models available, and are subsequently free to work with these in order to make them fit the complex reality that surrounds them in a way that best suits their point of view. In connection with the above, it could be interesting to follow up the present study with an investigation of the potential differences between the seemingly perfectly equivalent words and expressions used to denote lone parents, such as *alenefar* and *alenemor*. As already indicated at the level of systemic data, and later reflected in some of the collected texts, significant differences could exist as to the conceptualization patterns and valuing which they carry dependent on the gender of the parent.

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Dictionaries and corpora

Den Danske Ordbog (DDO): <https://ordnet.dk/ddo>

KorpusDK: <https://ordnet.dk/korpusdk>

Summary

The aim of the article is to analyze the status of the notion of nuclear family in Danish, as well as examine the extent to which the alternative family forms have been able to break through into the mentality of Danish speakers. The first two parts of the study, based on the most linguistically entrenched expressions, revealed that nuclear family can still be regarded as the ideal case, although alternative family forms are also clearly reflected in language. The second part of the study, dealing with a corpus of 50 contemporary texts, demonstrated that the above mentioned ideal is currently being under revision, and that the proponents of the nuclear family model are rather in a disadvantageous position in the Danish discourse. What stood out in both parts of the study, was the non-discriminating and embrace character of the Danish language with regard to the new family forms.

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