

Assessment of Majbritt Glans' (MG) *speciale* entitled
"Vowel change in Australian English – A sociolinguistic perspective"

The *speciale* submitted by MG is 96 pages long. It includes a table of contents, a list of symbols and abbreviations, 25 figures, 8 tables, and a bibliography.

The general topic of MG's *speciale* is currently observable change in one variety of English. Recent research in diachronic linguistics and in sociolinguistics has provided important and interesting insights on the mechanisms of language change. However, these studies have focused almost exclusively on English as spoken in North America and on the British Isles. MG has chosen to examine recent change in the vowel system of a lesser-studied variety of English, namely Australian English. The topic of her thesis did not allow for MG to collect her own data, rather she had to rely on published and unpublished sources which contained information on vowel change and social stratification of Australian English. Identifying these sources was an important prerequisite for the work on the thesis, and MG did so independently and successfully. It also bears some note that MG acquired the knowledge of sociolinguistics and, to a certain extent, phonetics, which was necessary for her study, independently.

The *speciale* is clearly structured, consisting of 5 chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 clearly states the object and the structure of the thesis, and the introductory chapters 2-3 present an overview of relevant aspects of linguistic change (appropriately focused on research methodology and on factors in linguistic change) and on the characteristics of Australian English to the extent that they are relevant for the thesis. MG's presentation of the study of current change (Chapter 2) is, in general, clear, but the wealth of relevant information presented in this chapter has occasionally led her to omit explanations of crucial terms and concepts, offering clarity for the sake of brevity. However, MG clearly conveys the impression that she is thoroughly familiar with the most important research issues and with the methodology of sociolinguistic studies and studies of current language change. Chapter 3 is a remarkably comprehensive presentation of the characteristics, the variation, and the social stratification of Australian English vowels. The only criticism of this chapter is that the amount of background information on the (methodology of the) studies which MG draws on is very limited.

Chapters 4 and 5 represent the main parts of the *speciale*. Chapter 4 is a detailed description and analysis of recent changes in the vowel system of Australian English. MG skillfully uses figures and tables to organize the data, and she demonstrates clearly that she can use the conceptual tools of

sociolinguistics to provide well-founded interpretations of the mechanisms of vowel changes in Australian English. It is clear testimony to MG's competence that she discusses her own interpretations critically and that she avoids the risk of speculating beyond the data. Whereas chapter 4 discusses the mechanisms of potential internal factors such as chain shifts in vowel changes, chapter 5 is concerned with external (social) factors that may serve to explain the observed changes. Building upon the analytical tools presented in chapter 2, MG focuses primarily on the contribution of age, gender, and socio-economic class to the changes identified in chapters 3 and 4. Again, MG demonstrates her competence at using the tools of sociolinguistic analysis, which leads her to argue convincingly that the gender factor is more important than socio-economic factors due to the blurring of class distinctions in Australia. The chapter concludes with a speculative, but well-argued proposal for a change in prestige patterns which may underlie the observed linguistic changes.

The conclusion (Chapter 6) summarizes the *speciale* appropriately and concisely. Apart from her conclusions, MG includes suggestions for future studies of Australian English.

On the whole, the *speciale* leaves us with the impression that MG is a competent scholar. She has familiarized herself with all the relevant aspects of the topic of her *speciale*, she is capable of relating her knowledge clearly and effectively (including her use of tables and figures, which is well motivated to illustrate relevant points), and she demonstrates a very good ability to evaluate the methodology and interpret the findings of studies of linguistic change independently and critically. The only major criticism that we have of the *speciale* is that it would have benefited from more detailed information on the studies on which MG builds her presentation. The *speciale* contains a few grammatical errors and very few idiomatic errors. However, these minor shortcomings do not distract from the high quality of the contents of the *speciale*.

On the 13-grade scale, we assign the *speciale* submitted by Majbritt Glans a grade of 11 (eleven).


Flemming Wegeberg
Censor


Ocke-Schwen Bohn
Vejleder