Proc. 5th int. Congr. phon. Sci., Münster 1964, pp. 495–501
(S. Karger, Basel/New York 1965).

# The Phonemes of a Dialectal Area, Perceived by Phoneticians and by the Speakers Themselves

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1. At the Institut for jysk sprog- og kulturforskning, University of Aarhus, Denmark, material is being collected both for a Dictionary and for a Linguistic Atlas of the dialects of Jutland. One of the methods used is questionnaires sent to between 500 and 600 dialect speaking informants who do not know any phonetic alphabet but answer the questions as well as they can in Danish orthography. 1959 they were asked their pronunciation of the word *høj* (high). The answers are plotted in the map of figure 1. Merely orthographic variants have been given the same sign. The signs have been placed parish by parish, so that identical information from the same parish have been given only one sign.

As you will see the resulting map is a very clear one, with sharp boundaries and general agreement in the areas. This agreement must have some foundation in the pronunciation, and there can be no doubt that the answers give us the speakers' perception of the phonemes of their own speech. In other words it is a phonemic transcription.

2. 1880 and 1887 *Wenker* sent out his famous Fragebogen in Germany, to which then belonged the Danish speaking North-Slesvig. The questionnaires were sent to each school in a parish and were filled in by the teacher. The word 'high' occurs in question 29. The answers are plotted on figure 2. In this case *all* answers are shown as it was easy to localize them to a school district inside a parish. The answers are of course written in common orthography and as before merely orthographic variants are given by the same sign. The resulting map corresponds well to that of figure 1. But in details there are some discrepancies. A closer scrutiny reveals, however, that they can almost all be ascribed to the teacher. It seems probable

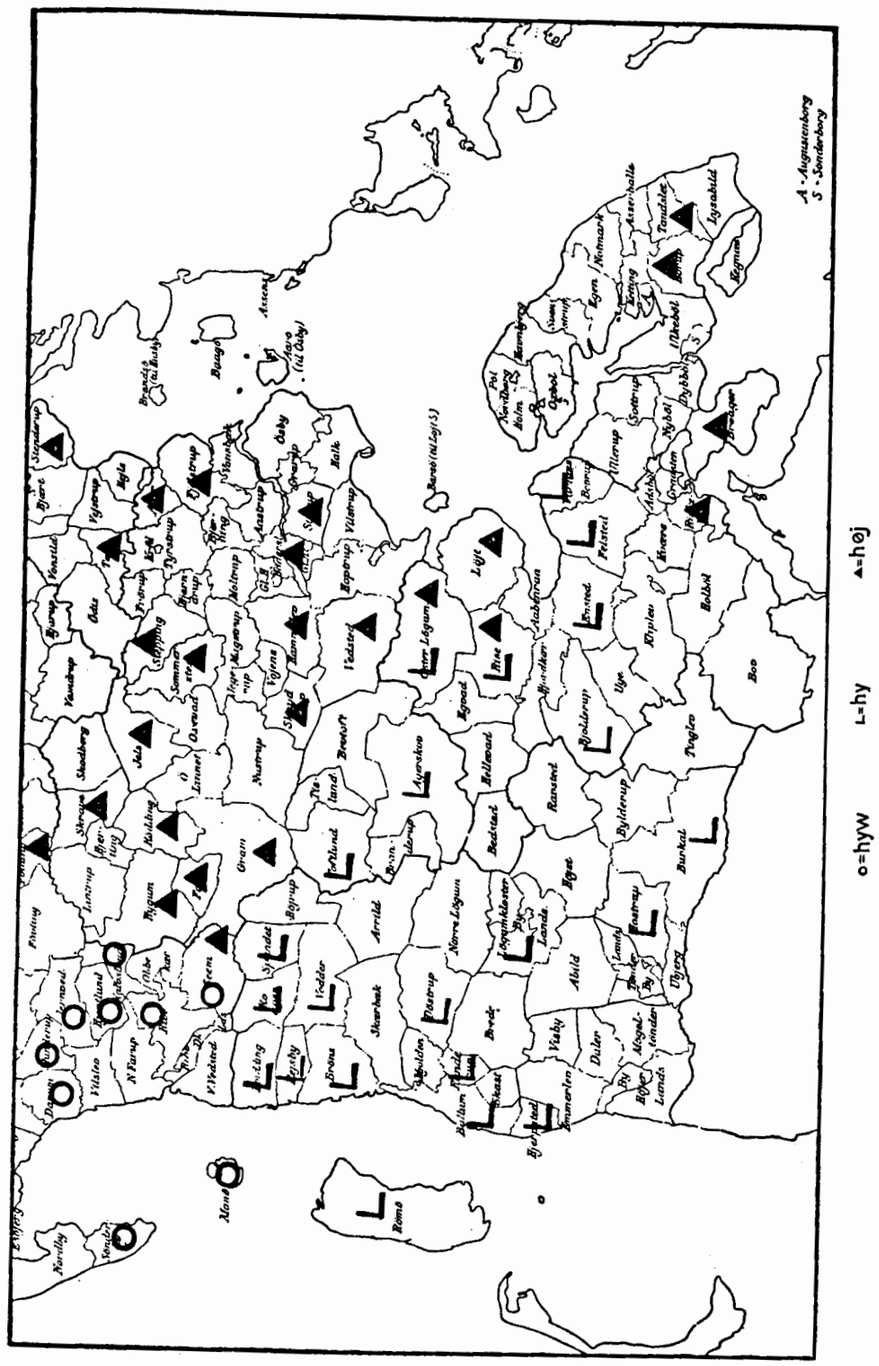


*Fig. 1.* The North-Slesvig section of the dialectal pronunciation in Jutland of the Danish word 'høj' according to informants 1959.



that if the answers had been given us directly from the speakers without any intermediate link the two maps would have corresponded closely to each other.

3. In the 1920's and 1930's the Danish *Stednavneudvalg* (Place Name Society) sent out fieldworkers to get a phonetical notation of the place names of North-Slesvig. They are published in "Sønderjyske Stednavne". Kbh. 1931 ff. Here the word '*høj*' is found a lot of times. As was the case in figure 1 the signs have been placed parish by parish, and identical examples inside a parish are represented by only one sign. In order to facilitate the comparison with figures 1 and 2 only the *vowel quality* is shown on figure 3 and no regard has been payed to suprasegmental fenomena. Nevertheless it has been necessary to use a lot of different signs. This is what was to be expected and we begin our comparison of the phonemic and phonetic maps in good spirit, hoping to get information of the phoneme and its realization. This is, however, not the case. We do not find any meaningful clear-cut distribution of the pronunciation, only a great confusion. And our scrutiny reveals several surprising things. In the western region we find a clear variation between the vowel *y* and a more open quality conditioned by a following palatalized t, but it is a surprise that in five not neighbouring parishes we have an opening to *ø* which we would have expected to be /hø/ and not /hy/. An additional surprise is it that one of the instances is in the /høj/-area. Still more surprising is it that in the eastern region we find the same variation in six parishes in which it has hitherto not been known to exist. It seems to have wedged itself in through a hy-area.

In the /høj/-region of the east we find that on the island of Als the pronunciation is exceptionally unvarying, a stability which one would not have thought possible, while on the other hand the north-eastern part shows us an equally exceptional variability. If we had only had the Wenker-questionnaire we would here have found an interesting example of a geographical penetration of the /hy/-pronunciation, occurring in recent years. The 1959 questionnaire makes, however, this interpretation impossible.

But quite a new light is thrown upon these futile speculations when we turn to figure 4. This is a map of the fieldworkers. As it will be seen there are mainly three, all of them trained phoneticians. Fieldworker number 1, represented by a triangel is a native of the western area. But he seems to have been unable to liberate himself

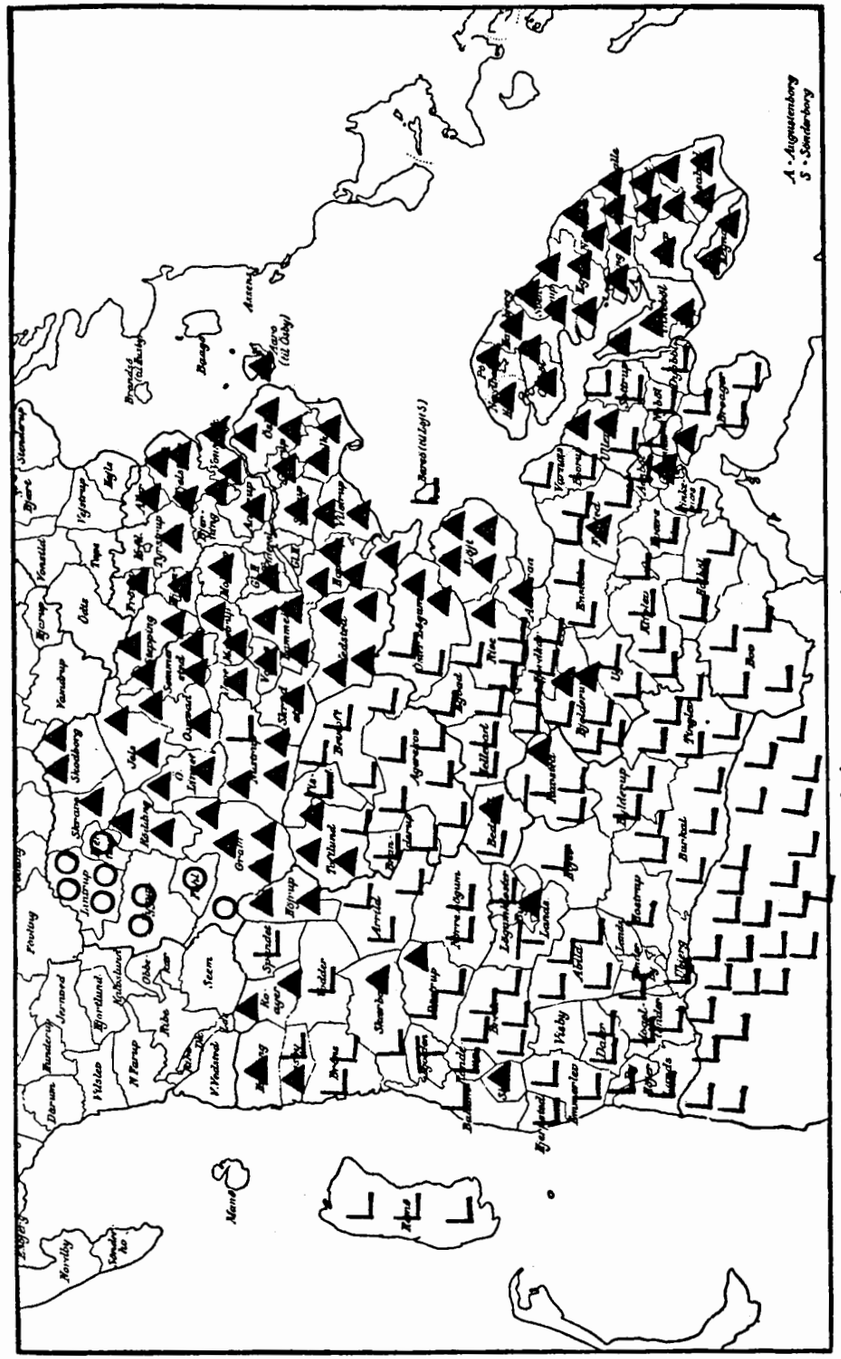


*Fig. 2.* The pronunciation of the word 'høj' in North-Slesvig according to the Wenker-questionnaire 1880 and 1887.



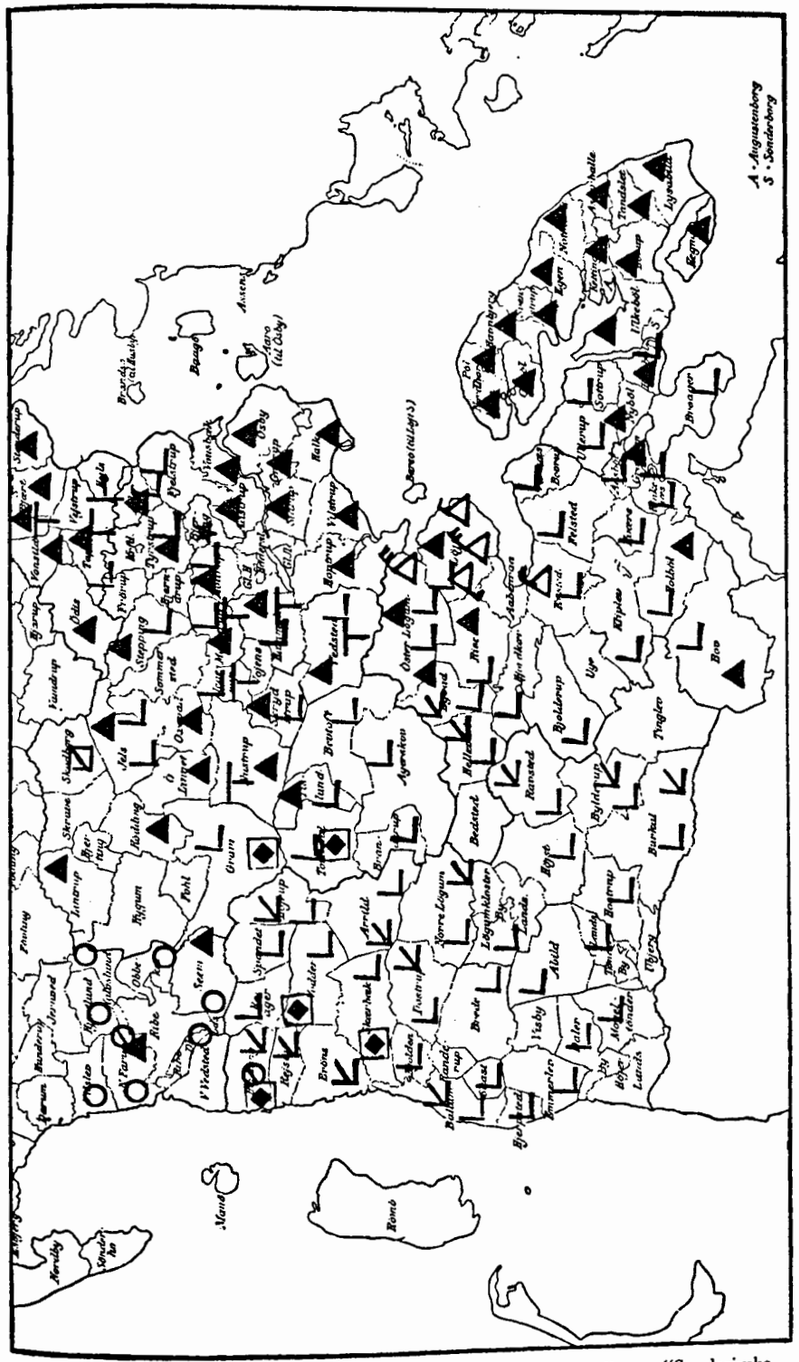


*Fig. 3.* The pronunciation of the word 'høj' in North-Slesvig according to "Sønderjyske Santedvne" 1931 ff.

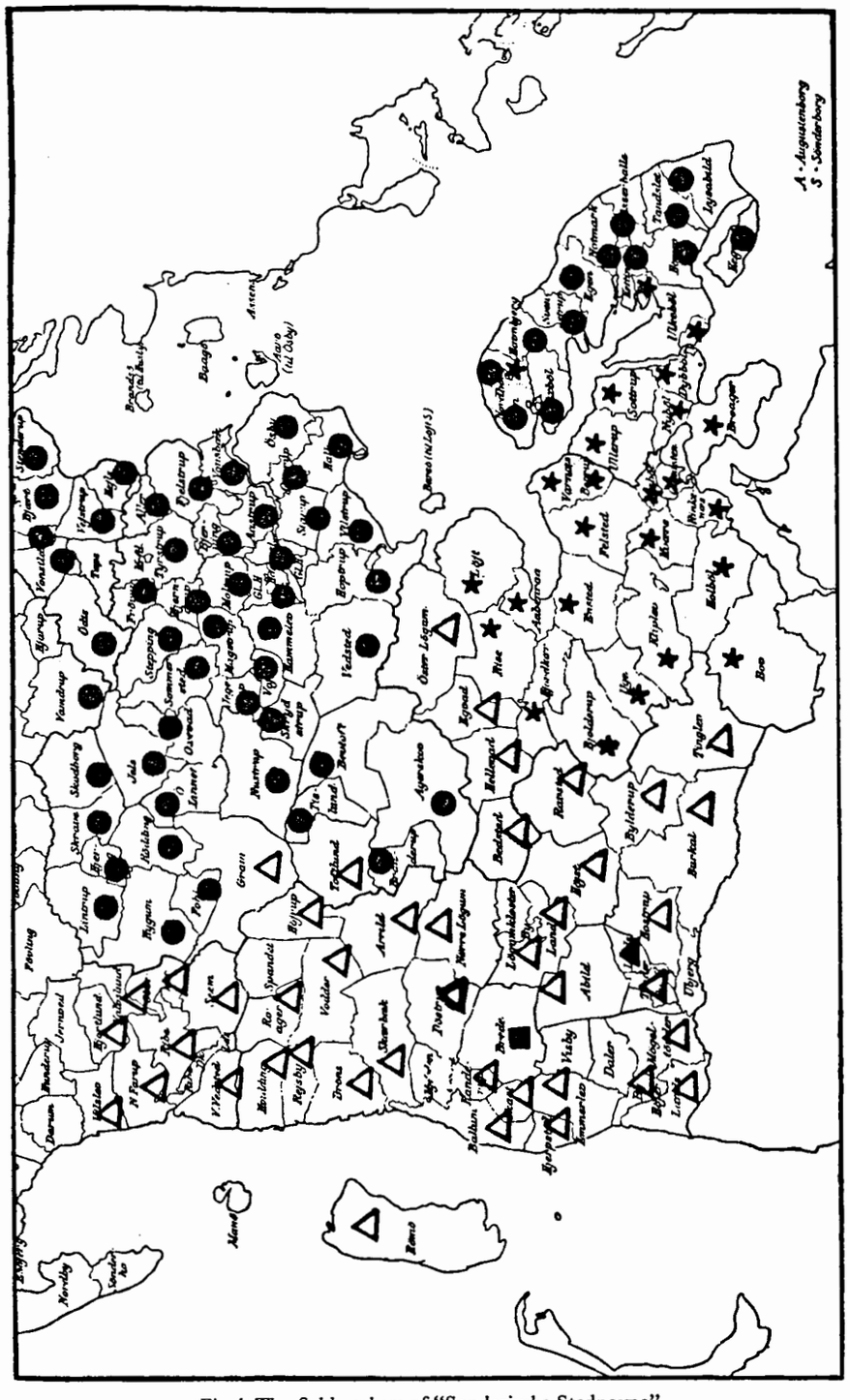

*Fig. 4.* The fieldworkers of "Sønderjyske Stednavne".



of his native speech with its variations which he has heard everywhere he has been, hence the curious above mentioned wedge into the eastern part.

It is interesting that he never has noted the slightly diphthongized pronunciation *hyj*, given so often by fieldworker number 3 and by three of the teachers of the Wenker-questionnaire. His failing to note it may perhaps be taken to show, that although he intended to use narrow transcription he has nevertheless transcribed his own speech phonemically. Fieldworker number 2 represented by a star seems to be rather reliable. Fieldworker number 3 seems on the other hand to be the most unreliable of them all. While he was on the island of Als he seems to have made the resolution to disregard lesser variations although he was using narrow transcription. But when he came to the north-eastern part he seems to have made the opposite resolution and tried to note faithfully what he heard, or believed he heard.

The very sad conclusion is then that *the narrow transcriptions of the phoneticians do not tell us so very much about the actual dialectal realizations of the phonemes* but tell us more about the fieldworkers themselves, about their native pronunciations and about their confusion when coming to new regions.

By this I do not want to say that we should base our work solely upon direct information from lay speakers. There are a lot of things they cannot inform us about in traditional orthography.

Neither do I want to say that we should always distrust phoneticians. If they are well acquainted with the dialect or language in question, especially if they are native speakers, they can give us the same as the layman and a lot more.

But I think that a study should always be the result of a close cooperation between the native speakers and a trained scholar who knows the language and knows what he is doing.

And I do want to say that I entirely distrust the information from fieldworkers whose material is derived from some hours' tape recording or some week's stay at a village. *They can give us neither a phonemic nor a reliable phonetic transcription.*

It is sad that most of the material for linguistic studies and atlases throughout the world is obtained in just this way at present.

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