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Dealing with the "Third Enemy":
English-Language Learning and Native-Language Maintenance
among Danish Immigrants in Utah, 1850-1930

by Lynn Henrichsen, George Bailey, and Jacob Huckaby

Introduction: "The Third Enemy"

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, over 22,000 Scandinavians joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter referred to as the church or the LDS church) and migrated to Utah. Well over half of these Scandinavians, 12,350 (not including children age 12 and under), were Danes.

This influx of people who spoke a language other than English and came from a cultural background different from that of the original Anglo-American settlers of Utah presented some perplexing challenges. Even Brigham Young, the territorial governor and LDS church president, found them difficult to resolve. According to local folklore, he once said, "Twenty-eight wagons and all Danish! That language! Everything they say comes out upside down or inside out." For many decades, Young and other government and church leaders wrestled with linguistic issues in their efforts to help the Danes integrate into Utah society.

For the Danish immigrants themselves, language issues were also problematic. Johnson asserts that once these Scandinavians arrived, they faced three enemies. The first two—the wicked, unpredictable climate of the Great Basin and the unfriendly Native Americans—are widely recognized. However, the third enemy that Johnson mentions is less well known. In fact, most people would never guess that it was the English language. Nevertheless, for the early Danish immigrants in Utah, English was just as forbidding as the hostile Native Americans and harsh climate. Gaining proficiency in this new language was difficult—especially for the older Danes—and "language barriers hindered full participation by many bright and capable Danish immigrants in Utah society." Because of language-
learning difficulties and in spite of pressure and support for learning English, many immigrants continued to use Danish—not just for a few months or even a few years, but for decades.

Research Focus and Outline
Our research has focused on the struggles that early Danish immigrants to Utah had with this “third enemy,” and on the efforts of Utah government and church leaders to deal with the related linguistic issues of the time. Our investigations have concentrated on the Danish pioneers’ difficulties and successes with English language learning, as well as the government and church support that was provided to help them in this effort. In addition, we have examined the immigrants’ efforts to maintain their ancestral tongue in order to communicate with each other and preserve cultural ties with their homeland.

The time period on which our research focused was from 1850 to 1930. Brigham Young and the Mormon pioneers arrived in Utah in 1847, but the Danish migration to Utah did not commence until a few years later, “on January 31, 1852, when a group of nine Mormons left Copenhagen... continued by steamer to England, and eventually sailed from Liverpool with nineteen additional Danes who joined them there under the leadership of Erastus Snow.” In what has been called one of “the first waves of Danish emigration” to the United States, over the next four decades, many thousands of their compatriots followed. By 1890, this flood had peaked, and by 1930, most of the first generation of Danish immigrants, as well as the programs that had been instituted to help them learn English or to maintain the Danish language and culture, had died.

Our paper first presents demographic information on Danish immigrants to Utah in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including data on Danish settlement patterns in pioneer Utah. Then, it explains language policies, programs, and publications—in Denmark and in pioneer Utah—designed to help the Danes learn English, as well as to allow them to continue using their mother tongue. Finally, it discusses some social factors that encouraged or discouraged these processes.
Settlement Patterns of Danish Immigrants to Utah

In 1850, there were only 35 Scandinavians living in the Utah territory and only two of them were Danes. In the decade between 1850 and 1860, however, there was a dramatic population shift resulting from a combination of “push” and “pull” factors. The year before, on June 5, 1849, Denmark’s new constitution was signed and the absolute monarchy was overthrown. Among other things, this new, liberal constitution provided for freedom of religion. Later, in the early 1860s, when “tensions in Europe were reaching a boiling point over Denmark’s attempted annexation of Schleswig,” many Danes emigrated “to avoid becoming cannon fodder in Denmark’s armed conflict...with Prussia and Austria.” Once mighty Denmark was on its way to being “reduced to one of Europe’s smallest nations,” and the Danes’ feelings ran from “paralysis” to “bitterness.” During this period, poor economic conditions in Denmark were yet another “push” factor, while America’s relative attractiveness was an important “pull” factor. About the same time, Brigham Young sent Latter-day Saint missionaries to the Scandinavian countries. These missionaries began in Denmark, and were very successful. Between 1850 and 1905 there were 46,000 Scandinavian converts to Mormonism. Of this number, 50% were Danes. At that time, LDS church policy encouraged the “gathering of the faithful.” In fact, “Brigham Young declared in 1860 that emigration ‘upon the first feasible opportunity, directly follows obedience to the first principles of the gospel we have embraced.’”

For all these reasons, by 1860, the Danish population in the Utah territory had jumped from two to 1,824, or 4.53 percent of the total population. These “Danish Latter-day Saints were in the vanguard of emigration from Denmark to the United States.” In fact, in 1860, the Danish population in the remote Utah territory was 18.3%, almost one-fifth, of the total Danish population in the United States (30,107). As Figure 1 shows, by 1870, Utah had 4,957 Danish-born residents, constituting 5.7% of the state’s population, and the total kept growing for several more decades. In 1890, “10 percent of the state’s population...either were born in Denmark or had at least one parent born in Denmark.” Utah’s Danish population reached a peak of 9,132 in 1900. Thereafter, it declined, as immigration to
Utah from Denmark diminished, and the immigrant generation began to die off.

![Graph showing Utah Scandinavian Population, 1850-1930](image)

**Figure 1.** Scandinavians in Utah, 1850-1930. (Jensen, Immigration to Utah).

When the Danish immigrants arrived in Utah, they usually went to one of three general areas: the Sanpete/Sevier County area or the Cache/Box Elder County area, both of which were mostly rural in nature, or the Salt Lake/Utah County area, Utah's urban center. The first reason immigrants congregated to these areas was that they were assigned to settle in certain communities. As leader of the Mormon immigration movement, Brigham Young solved the problem of large numbers of new Scandinavian arrivals by dividing them up and “sending half of them to help settle in Cache County on the north and the others south to the Manti settlement [in Sanpete county]...” Even after Brigham Young stopped assigning new arrivals to communities, however, the pattern of migration to these communities persisted. In a common pattern known as “chain migration,” many immigrants went to areas populated by those of the same ethnic background—especially friends and family members who had immigrated earlier. They went to where they felt comfortable, where they could fit in and be a part of society, and where they could communicate in a familiar language and get the help they needed to succeed in the new land. Later, however, for
economic reasons, many arriving Danes either remained in Salt Lake County or moved back to Salt Lake County from where they had been sent before.

As the graphs in Figure 1 illustrate, although Scandinavian immigrants to Utah included Swedes and Norwegians, there was a noticeable Danish cultural and linguistic dominance. In 1860, for instance, there were almost 2,000 Danes, compared to a combined total of only 355 Norwegians and Swedes. Although more Norwegians and Swedes came later, the Danes continued to dominate. For this reason, several towns (Ephraim, Spring City, Mantua, Levan, etc.) in different parts of Utah or certain parts of larger cities were known as either “Little Denmark” or “Little Copenhagen,” but there were no places called “Little Stockholm” or “Little Oslo.” This pattern persisted for many years. “At a conference in Ephraim about the year 1900, a speaker asked all the Danish people in the audience to please stand up, and about 75% rose to their feet.” It is worth noting that because of this dominance many Utahns lumped all Scandinavians into one category—Dane. One Scandinavian immigrant in Utah wrote back to his family in Norway saying, “Jeg kan ikke opregne alle De Danske der er her som I kjender for der er saa mange gode Danske, Svenske, Norske og Bornholmere, disse kalder de alle Danske her . . .” [I cannot count up all the Danes there are here whom you know because there are so many good Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, and people from Bornholm. All these they call Danes here].

Policy and Programs Supporting the Learning of English

Because of the above mentioned demographic and linguistic circumstances of the time, Brigham Young became highly involved in language matters. Initially, his approach was simple and straightforward. He and other leaders in pioneer Utah strongly encouraged the new arrivals to learn the English language. William Dixon, an author and traveler in the West, once heard a speech given by Brigham Young to newly arrived immigrants in which he said the following:

You are faint and weary from your march. Rest, then, for a day, for a second day, should you need it; then rise up, and
see how you will live...Be of good cheer. Look about this valley into which you have been called. Your first duty is to learn how to grow a cabbage, and along with this cabbage an onion, a tomato, a sweet potato; then how to feed a pig, to build a house, to plant a garden, to rear cattle, and to bake bread; in one word, your first duty is to live. The next duty,—for those who, being Danes, French, and Swiss, cannot speak it now—is to learn English... . These things you must do first; the rest will be added to you in proper season.31 [italics added]

Other church leaders expressed similar sentiments. For instance, in 1868 George A. Smith (an LDS apostle and counselor to Brigham Young) proclaimed:

It is very desirable that all of our brethren who are not acquainted with the English language should learn it. . . . We want them all—men and woman, old and young—to learn the English language so perfectly that they will be able to thoroughly understand for themselves the teachings and instructions and the published works of the Church, as well as the laws of the country. . . . We hope the bishops and teachers will make every reasonable exertion to stir up the minds of the brethren and sisters who do not thoroughly understand English to the importance of this counsel.32

Once they arrived in the United States, some Danes were willing to abandon all things Danish. Nils Grahn, a market researcher for the Utah Posten in the late 1800s, talked about how some fellow Danes made the remarkable claim that “they would never permit a Danish paper or book to come into their home.” They were in the New World now. “Their mother tongue should be locked up. All should be English!” Then he added, “which I think they never learn.”33

Some nineteenth-century Mormon Danes studied English individually even before immigrating, as an entry from Niels Nielsen’s 1856 journal illustrates: “[Jeg opholdt] mig dels jemme [sic] og i Kjøbenhavn. Jeg øvede mig i Det Engelske Sprog” [I stayed part of the time at home and part of the time in Copenhagen. I also studied and practiced the English language].34 In support of the Danish converts’ efforts to learn English, the church provided English classes and materials for them—even before the immigrants
made their way to the United States. Many English classes were taught—including some by a youthful Anthon Lund, who later became a counselor in the church’s “first presidency” (its highest governing council) in Utah. Typically, these classes were held in people’s homes in the evenings. John August Olsen, an LDS convert from Norway, was in Copenhagen in 1894 and recorded having seen 75 people in just one English class there.

One important figure in the establishment of English classes in Scandinavia, H.C. Haight, was an American who converted to the LDS church in the United States and then was sent on a mission to England. There he was made mission president over Scandinavia. Once he got to Denmark, he organized many English classes. Haight recorded in his journal that some Danish members of the church had started to create “a Book for the benefit of the Saints in their learning of the English Language.”

Under his direction, Reading Exercises in the English Language for Newbeginners [or Læseøvelser i det engelske Sprog for Begyndere] (see Figure 2) was published.

The book included vocabulary lists organized categorically, long lists of phrases, short stories with translations both in English and Danish, and instructions on how to make the trek to Utah. Using this book, Danish immigrants learned functional English—how they
could ask about buying wagons, buying supplies, and making their way to the United States and then on to Utah. This book appeared in print only ten years after Fribert published [in 1847] the first guidebook to America written by a Dane and was apparently one of many such publications. Even in the Skandinaviens Stjerne, the newsletter published in the LDS Scandinavian mission, there was one issue in which directions to get to Utah were published.

After arriving in Utah, Danes also engaged in English study. English classes were made available in many communities where there were large numbers of Scandinavians, and some high-profile church and community leaders helped to teach them. Peter O. Hansen, well known for being one of the first LDS missionaries to Denmark, was one of these teachers. C.C.A. Christensen, a famous Danish artist and community leader in Sanpete County, also helped teach English classes.

Later on, the church became involved on a grander scale. Brigham Young, the church president, was very concerned about the challenges that the inconsistent English orthographic (i.e., spelling) system presented to English language learners. According to one report, an experience that served as a catalyst for Brigham Young’s later actions in this regard occurred when he heard his daughter teaching a young Danish girl to read. The Danish girl read the word throw as in to throw a ball and pronounced it throw, like cow. When his daughter corrected the Danish girl and said it had a long o sound as in go, the Danish girl asked why it wasn’t spelled t-h-r-o instead of t-h-r-o-w. Supposedly, this experience started Brigham Young thinking about how he could reform English letters and spelling.

The result of his thinking along these lines was the Deseret Alphabet, a new orthographic system for writing English. The Deseret Alphabet was developed mostly by George Watt, a British convert to Mormonism who had been a student of Sir Isaac Pitman, a famous British educator and spelling reformer, the founder of The Phonetic Institute in Bath, England, and the creator of Pitman shorthand. When Watt came to Utah, he used the principles of Pitman’s “phonography” (phonetics and shorthand) to design the Deseret Alphabet. In this effort, he was assisted by a committee of
well known and respected LDS leaders—Parley P. Pratt, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, and Robert C. Campbell.47

Brigham Young was enthusiastic about the new writing system and the benefits it promised to English speakers and English learners alike:

The advantages of this alphabet will soon be realized, especially by foreigners. Brethren who come here knowing nothing of the English language will find its acquisition greatly facilitated by means of this alphabet, by which all the sounds of the language can be represented and expressed with the greatest ease. As this is the grand difficulty foreigners experience in learning the English language, they will find a knowledge of this alphabet will greatly facilitate their efforts in acquiring at least a partial English education.48

An editorial in Salt Lake City’s Deseret News was equally enthusiastic about the many advantages of the new alphabet:

By this means, strangers cannot only acquire a knowledge of our language much more readily, but a practiced reporter can also report a strange tongue so that the strange language when spoken can be legible by one conversant with the tongue.49

The principles upon which the Deseret Alphabet was based were in harmony with the best linguistic science of the day. Isaac Pitman was only one of numerous nineteenth-century advocates of reforming English spelling according to phonetic principles. Others included Noah Webster and George Bernard Shaw.50 In terms of the principles of phonetic consistency on which its 38 symbols were based, the Deseret Alphabet was a precursor to the widely used International Phonetic Alphabet that was later developed by the International Phonetic Association, which was founded in Paris in 1886 and whose members included such linguistic luminaries as Henry Sweet (England), Otto Jespersen (Denmark), and Wilhelm Viëtor (Germany).51

In Utah, the Deseret Alphabet received official support from President/Governor Brigham Young, as well as other church and government leaders, and was promoted widely. At considerable
expense, readers like The Deseret First Book\textsuperscript{52} were published. "The Deseret News featured translations from the Gospel of St. Matthew for about one and a half years....store signs were painted...tombstones made—all in the unusual characters of the Deseret Alphabet....Church records were recorded...for a period of a year. Six gold coins were minted between 1849 and 1860...in the Deseret Alphabet."\textsuperscript{53} Some Utahns used the Deseret Alphabet to write in their journals.\textsuperscript{54} The new orthography was even used for keeping minutes in church meetings,\textsuperscript{55} and an edition of The Book of Mormon was published in the Deseret Alphabet.\textsuperscript{56}

Historical records show that the Deseret Alphabet also was used in some of the English classes that were organized for Danes. One immigrant, O.N. Liljenqvist, wrote in a letter included in a Scandinavian newsletter, "Her findes to Skoler foruden en Søndagsskole og en Aftenskole, i hvilken vi øve os i at læse og skrive Deseret Alphabet" [Here are found two schools in addition to a Sunday school and an evening school where we practice reading and writing the Deseret Alphabet].\textsuperscript{57}

These reported uses notwithstanding, the Deseret Alphabet was never adopted widely—especially after the railroad arrived in 1869, making it easy to transport books printed in the traditional English orthography to Utah. After Brigham Young's death in 1877, the already dying Deseret Alphabet movement was largely abandoned. Nevertheless, this "noble linguistic experiment" by the church "in the midst of its pioneer labors"\textsuperscript{58} reflected the great concern that Brigham Young and other church and community leaders in Utah had for helping the Danes and other immigrants learn English.

**Danish Language Maintenance in Utah**

Despite this strong counsel and substantial support for learning English, the linguistic "street" ran both ways in pioneer Utah; there was no "English Only" policy. On the contrary, allowances were made for the Scandinavian languages to be spoken. Brigham Young himself, although he strongly desired the immigrants to learn English, was understanding of their need to use their native languages, as a letter written in 1869 to Mssrs. Monson and Sholdebrand, illustrates: "Yours of recent date has been received. I
have no objection to your getting up a little Theatre at Christmas for the Scandinavians of this city, as it will tend to the gratification of your countrymen who do not understand the English language." But notice he also emphasizes, "I would also be pleased to have you study & familiarize yourselves with the English language so that you can lend assistance at our Theatre if agreeable. Your brother in the Gospel. Brigham Young." 59

Under Brigham Young's direction, Scandinavian-language congregations were organized for members of the LDS church who could not speak English. The first known of these congregations was established in Sanpete County. On September 30, 1853, Hans Dinesen, a Danish immigrant, wrote in his journal, "I reached Salt Lake City..." Two weeks later, on the 14th of October, his company started for Sanpete, and on the 15th "reached 'Little Denmark,' (now Spring City)" where "the first Danish meeting was held in a little log house, owned by Hans Chr. Hansen, a brother of Peter O. Hansen." Soon thereafter, Dinesen and the other residents of "Little Denmark" had serious difficulties with the weather and the native Americans, the first two "enemies," but they got some help with the third "enemy." As Dinesen's journal records, on Friday, December 16th:

The snow fell one foot deep; we packed up everything that could be moved and started for Manti, through the deep snow and severe cold weather. We had no sooner started than the Indians swooped down on what was left and set fire to the houses, hay stacks, etc., and burned up everything that was left. And in the midst of this trouble and hardship, Erastus Snow, then an apostle, came to us. . . . He had instructions from Prest. Young to "organize the Scandinavian meetings," and he said "this should last as long as the Scandinavian emigration should continue." 60

This "Scandinavian meeting" was only the first of many such language-based congregations. In fact, in some Utah communities they continued for many decades. 61 Leaders were sensitive to the linguistic challenges immigrants faced:

It is quite natural that the Saints who come from foreign lands have some difficulty to adjust themselves to the customs and traditions of new land. The worst obstacle with
which they are confronted is probably the language which as a rule they do not understand or speak. The leaders of the Church have been aware of this situation on a large scale. For this reason organizations for the foreign-speaking people have been set up to assist these brothers and sisters in the process of adjustment. . . .\textsuperscript{62}

Worthy of special note were "the elderly immigrants who will never learn the new language sufficiently well to speak it with ease."\textsuperscript{63} One account illustrates this point:

David og Mette Marie Madsen, som i 1880 . . . emigrerede, bosatte sig i Utah i Sevier County i en lille by ved navn Elsinore. Da de ankom, var 92\% af indbyggerne danske. De talte dansk indbyrdes, og mindst til 1915 foregik gudstjenesterne også på dansk. Mette Marie lærte aldrig at tale engelsk. \[David and Mette Marie Madsen, who in 1880 . . . emigrated, settled in Utah in Sevier County in a little town by the name of Elsinore. When they arrived, 92\% of the residents were Danes. They spoke Danish mutually, and worship services were carried out in Danish until at least 1915. Mette Marie never learned to speak English.\]\textsuperscript{64}

Even today, the folklore of Sanpete County is peppered with amusing anecdotes about the Danes' struggles with English. One such story about a "Danish Meeting" illustrates their difficulties. It recounts, "One of the brethren was called upon to say the prayer at the beginning of the meeting. He prayed in English. After he had prayed for a while, Mormon Preacher (Andrew Christian Neilson), who always pulled his chair up close to the stove shouted out, 'Pray in Danish.' The frustrated man exclaimed, 'Oh, Yah, yah, yah!' He then started his prayer all over again, praying in Danish."\textsuperscript{65}

Other churches in Utah also offered Danish-language services. Not too long after the Mormons arrived in the territory, Presbyterian and Methodist missions were set up, and they conducted their meetings in Danish. Danish Lutheran minister F.W. Blohm was commissioned and financed by the Presbyterian Church to start a mission in Utah.\textsuperscript{66} The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church also established a "mission among the Mormons in Utah."\textsuperscript{67} The Danish Lutheran Church worked to maintain the immigrants'
cultural ties with Denmark. Nevertheless, in 191, with the bombing of the *Lusitania*, the national mood changed, America started preparing for World War I, a new wave of nationalistic patriotism swept the United States, and even the Danish church started to shift toward using the English language in its meetings.68 This shift, of course, was preceded by many years of debate in the Danish Lutheran Church in the United States between the “happy Danes” and the “holy Danes.” 69 The former “maintained that Danish immigrants should strive to learn English while, at the same time, preserving their Danish” and the latter worked toward being “as little Danish as possible” and “as American as we can to the best of our ability.”70

In nineteenth-century Utah, businesses and other organizations also responded to the linguistic needs of Danish immigrants. Speaking of one of the “Little Denmark” communities in Sanpete County, Brigham Young is purported (in local folklore) to have complained, “You can’t buy or sell a cow in Ephraim unless you do it in Danish!”71 Even in larger towns where English dominated, store windows had signs announcing, “De Skandinaviske Sprog Tales” [The Scandinavian languages are spoken here] to attract Scandinavian customers.72 Advertisements in local newspapers also proclaimed, “De Skandinaviske Sprog Tales.” In order to reach the Danish clientele and increase sales, ads that appeared in *Bikuben* [The Beehive]73 and the six other Scandinavian-language newspapers published in Utah included a lot more Danish. The businesses that employed the Danish language in this way were not just Scandinavian companies; many Anglo-American businesses did the same thing. In the town of Mt. Pleasant (in Sanpete County), the local ZCMI department store even employed one clerk who spoke English and a second clerk who spoke Danish to help the Scandinavian customers.74 In examining advertisements in *Bikuben*, we saw Danish-language ads for companies such as Peerless Laundry, The OK Shoe Company, and The Felt Radio Company. We even found one that boasted, “Der er intet Universitet i Bjergstaterne, der staar højere end Brigham Young Universitetet” [There is no university in the mountain states that stands taller than Brigham Young University.]75
In many parts of Utah, social gatherings for Danish immigrants proliferated. Scandinavian choirs were very popular, too. Other types of Scandinavian social opportunities included brass bands, political groups, literary clubs, and genealogical societies. Some Scandinavians worked to get others politically involved. One 1898 announcement (entirely in Swedish) of a political meeting sponsored by the Scandinavian Republican Club was surely designed to encourage and influence the Scandinavian vote.

Danish was used not only in efforts to reach out to the immigrants but also in attempts to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage. In later years, as the immigrant generation saw this heritage slipping away, many worked to preserve it. C.C.A. Christensen, a community leader in Sanpete County, was one of these. He had always been proud of being Danish. In fact, reporting in his journal about his arrival in the Salt Lake valley, Christensen wrote, “Vi naaede omsider vort Maal, Salt Lake City, d. 13de Septbr. 1857, med det danske Flag vajende fra min Haandkærre” [We finally reached our goal, Salt Lake City, September 13, 1857, with the Danish flag waving from my handcart] [italics added]. C.C.A. loved det Danske Sprog [the Danish language] and took every opportunity to make the immigrant feel proud of it. He had only scorn for those who hid all Old World books and bric-a-brac and tried to conceal their foreignness.” He wrote poetry to make fellow immigrants proud of their heritage language, and he was a frequent contributor to the Danish-language newspaper, Bikuben. In one poem titled “Rimbrev,” Christensen wrote of his love for Danish while describing how he and his fellow Danes waited for their cherished newspaper to arrive:

Man utaalmodig venter paa,
Aviser eller Brev at faa,
Men helst hver Fredag er man
der
Bikuben for at faa især.

Den har vi Danske jo saa kær,
Thi Sproget ligger Hjertet nær
[italics added].

We wait impatiently
To get newspapers or letters,
But we prefer to be there every Friday
In order to get the Bikuben.
We Danes are so fond of it,
For its language is so close to our hearts] [italics added].
In our research, we utilized the hundreds of issues of Bikuben that span nearly six decades, as a major data source. Because the paper targeted Scandinavians who had difficulty learning English, we looked through old Bikuben issues to see if we could find any kind of encouragement to learn English or any advertisements for English classes. To our surprise, we found absolutely nothing encouraging the readers of this paper to learn English. On the contrary, it was used specifically for communicating with those who spoke Scandinavian languages, and it was often used to promote Danish language maintenance. For example, the following lines from one poem titled “Det Skandinaviske Sprog” [The Scandinavian Language] in the first issue of Bikuben talked about pride in the mother tongue:

Kom Nordens Sönner, Dötren, hid
Og gamle, Unge stemmer i
I Modersmaal hvis Toneklang
Og Ord staar altid Tanken bi.

Vi skammes ei ved Nordens Sprog,
I hvilke vore Fædre gav
Os sidste Raad: – en
Pagtensbog –
For evig kjær – lig Hines Grav.
Og naar Vi atter møde dem –
Maaske de taler til os kjært
Paa gammel Dansk og Norsk og Svensk...

We are not ashamed of the language of the North
In which our fathers gave
Us final counsel: – a covenant book –
Forever dear – like yonder grave.
And when we meet them again –
Perhaps they will speak to us affectionately
In old Danish and Norwegian and Swedish...

Social Factors that Encouraged English and Discouraged Danish in Utah
In the end, however, despite the immigrants’ efforts to preserve the use of their beloved Danish, and despite their difficulties learning
the English language, Danish eventually stopped being spoken among the Danes and their descendants in Utah, and English replaced it. Although the older, immigrant generation continued to use Danish for a few more decades, in most Utah homes, the use of Danish came to an end in the early 1900s. "With few exceptions, relatively little sense of ethnic community survived beyond the generation of immigrants themselves." In fact, "most descendants of the immigrants who served as missionaries to ancestral lands had to learn the native language during their service."84

According to the sociolinguistic research literature on language shift for immigrants in America, the move from ancestral language to English typically takes three generations. Members of the first (arriving) generation learn as much of the new language as they can, becoming "simple" bilinguals, with some proficiency in English but certainly not mastery. Their children, however, grow up being predominantly exposed to both English (in school, on the playground, and elsewhere outside the home) and their ancestral tongue (in home and family contexts). As a result, they become complex, English-based bilinguals. They speak unaccented English while still maintaining some proficiency in the ancestral tongue, which they may or may not use with their parents at home. The third generation, the grandchildren of the immigrants, typically are English monolinguals, as are their children. In their homes and lives the ancestral tongue is no longer used.85

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Table 1. Rate of mother-tongue retention by second-generation Scandinavians in the United States, by ancestral nationality and in selected states (1940 data)86

For Danes in Utah, this three-generation shift was a common pattern, although in many cases the shift occurred even more
quickly because of the factors we will discuss later in this paper. Table 1 shows the rates of mother-tongue retention by second-generation Scandinavians in various states. In the United States as a whole, 31% of second-generation Danes still spoke Danish, 43% of second-generation Swedes still spoke Swedish, and 52% of Norwegians spoke Norwegian. In most states where there were large concentrations of Scandinavians—like Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa—the retention rates were even higher. In Utah, however, only 23% of second-generation Danes spoke Danish, and the mother-tongue retention rate was also unusually low for Swedish (24%) and Norwegian (16.7%). It is apparent that cultural assimilation and learning of English took place faster in Utah than it did in other parts of the United States. "While the 1980 census estimated that...137,941 Utahns had at least one Danish ancestor," very few of these modern-day Utahns of Danish ancestry were able to speak Danish.

In addition to the policies, programs, and publications discussed in earlier sections of this paper, several important social factors brought about this linguistic state of affairs. Sociolinguists specializing in language maintenance and shift have identified a variety of psychological, social, and cultural factors that help explain why linguistic assimilation does or does not occur among immigrant groups. These individual, group, intra-group, inter-group, and community factors include immigrants' native language, cultural attitudes, numerical strength, place of residence (rural vs. urban), isolation, social class, and many others. In this paper, we focus on just a few of the most salient of these factors.

First and foremost, in our estimation, comes respect for and acceptance of the Danes by the English-speaking majority in Utah. In the United States generally, "dense Dane" and "dumb Swede" stereotypes were common, and Scandinavian immigrants were sometimes socially ostracized. For instance, in 1887, an article in The New York Times claimed that the reason why the Mormon missionaries were having so much success in Scandinavia was because the Scandinavians were vulnerable because of their "inferior mental capabilities." "The Scandinavians were looked down on as being dirty, filthy, and undesirable."
In Utah, things were different. While the assimilation of the new immigrants did not take place without incident—in some communities there were ethnic divisions, and linguistic differences led to "language wars"—the Danish immigrants were generally accepted and respected. One reason for this acceptance and respect was because at that time almost all Utahns from different backgrounds shared the same religious views and saw each other as brothers and sisters. In many communities, Anglo-Americans, Danes, and other immigrants went to church meetings together. This church-related, acceptance factor resulted in "mixed nationality neighborhoods" and "greater willingness to accept and incorporate Scandinavians."  

In addition, leaders of the LDS church encouraged an attitude of accepting the immigrants as brothers and sisters. They sometimes even celebrated the ethno-linguistic diversity of Utah. Brigham Young is reported to have bragged, "We have French, we have Italians, we have Danes, we have Norwegians, we have Germans, we have Welch, we have all these different people from different countries and cultures, living in harmony in Utah." An 1853 editorial in Salt Lake City's Deseret News discussed the topic of language and cultural tolerance as the first Danes were arriving. One paragraph reads, "To see a people gathered from a multitude of nations...and those who gather being one in faith, fellowship, feeling, and acts, is an anomaly on the earth." However, the ideal of brotherhood was not universally practiced, and some native speakers of English were apparently looking down on the new, non-English-speaking immigrants. For this reason, the author of this editorial went on to warn of potential friction between the cultures.

We have referred to these things to put the saints on their guard, and prevent any root of bitterness from springing up among them; gathered from the four winds, not only in the shops but in neighborhoods, where those of different languages are located, it would be strange indeed if among the hundred different tongues spoke in Utah, little misunderstandings and difficulties should not arise, if all are not on their guard, but by watchfulness and care, all these difficulties may be avoided; and in process of time, not yet,
the Lord will restore a pure language, and then who will have reason to boast that he can talk an impure language better than his neighbor?97

Linguistic and social prestige is another factor affecting language maintenance or shift. In late nineteenth-century Utah, Danes and Danish in Utah enjoyed considerable prestige because there were many well known church leaders in positions of authority who spoke Scandinavian languages, and/or were Scandinavian born. At the highest levels of church leadership these included Erastus Snow, Peter O. Hansen, Anthon H. Lund, John A. Widtsoe, and Christian Daniel Fjeldsted. 98 Danes also filled many other, lower-level leadership positions in the LDS church, constituting 8 percent of the total number of bishops and presiding elders between 1848 and 1890.99 When their own people were put in positions of leadership and authority in this way, Danish immigrants in Utah naturally felt like their culture was respected and accepted.100 This encouraged their integration and assimilation in society.

Furthermore, a number of famous Scandinavians paid visits to Utah while doing tours of the United States. These included Jenny Lind the Swedish Nightingale,101 violinist Ole Bull, poet Kristofer Janson, singer Olivia Dahl, polar explorer Roald Amundson, and Erling Bjørnson, son of dramatist Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson.102 Their talents and accomplishments undoubtedly lent prestige to the local Scandinavian community. At the same time, these prestigious Scandinavians helped Anglo-American Mormons overcome the prevailing negative stereotypes of Scandinavians.

Ironically, the social acceptance of, and respect for, Danes in Utah actually encouraged the shift to English. As Grosjean103 point out, when “minority groups do not feel threatened,” they “do not react by overdefending their language and culture. This lack of opposition leads to easier assimilation.”

Additionally, increased levels of respect and acceptance naturally led to greater social interaction, and greater interaction also led to English learning among the Danes in Utah. In contrast, high degrees of “enclosure” (when speakers of a minority language live in isolated communities) typically result in native-language maintenance.104 This is what happened in many “Scandinavian
enclaves” in other parts of the United States\textsuperscript{105} and to some degree in heavily Scandinavian-populated Sanpete County in Utah, although due to church and economic factors the Danes there were never really isolated from English speakers. In Sanpete County, an interesting example of how social interaction (quite apart from formal instruction) led to language learning involves not English but Indian languages. In an 1856 letter, Christian Nielsen, a Danish immigrant, wrote:

Vi maa nu lære det engelske Sprog, som falder lidt besværligt for de ældre; Børn lære det strax. De fleste af de danske Børn og unge Folk tale temmelig godt Engelsk og Indiansk. Fritz holder engelsk Skole for nogle Danske. Vi kan ligesaa snart lære det Indianske, da vi komer oftere til at tale med dem end der gives Leilighed til at tale med Amerikanerne. Vi kan begynde at tale lidt af begge Slags, vores Børn taler bestandig Engelsk eller Indiansk. [We must now learn the English language, which comes with a bit of difficulty to the elderly. Children learn it right away. Most Danish children and youth speak rather good English and Indian. Fritz is holding English classes for some Danes. We can just as soon speak Indian (Southern Paiute) since we speak with them more often than we have the opportunity to speak with the Americans. We are able to speak a bit of both. Our children speak English or Indian constantly.]

Equally interesting is the report that when the Indians learned English from interacting with the Scandinavians, “some Indians learned to speak English with a Scandinavian accent.”\textsuperscript{107}

Respect and acceptance by the Anglo-American majority and increased interaction with them were, of course, welcomed by the Danes in Utah—especially in Salt Lake and Utah counties where they were clearly in the minority. Notwithstanding the prestige accorded to Danes and their language, however, English still had greater social prestige—especially for the younger generation. Consequently, in a pattern that can be found in many other minority-language communities in the United States, while the older people continued to use their native language, their children and grandchildren abandoned it in favor of English. For the new, born-
in-America generation, Danish was a language for old people. Many of the second generation wished to disassociate themselves from their Danish identities. They thought that it was “simple” to be of Scandinavian origin, felt alienated from other Americans, and wished to blend in with the other people around them. Semmingsen notes that the children of Norwegian immigrants elsewhere in America followed the same pattern. They were “concerned about speaking English without the accent that would reveal their ‘foreign’ origin.” When their parents would speak to them in the ancestral tongue, they would reply in English. Haugen provides a parallel explanation of how this happened among Norwegian immigrants in Wisconsin and Minnesota: “The children succeeded in limiting the sphere within which Norwegian was spoken. They spoke it only to one or a few older members of the family, usually a grandparent, while they spoke English to all others. If their position was exceptionally strong, they succeeded in evading the speaking entirely, even to their parents. This bilingual situation was highly typical, with parents speaking Norwegian and children answering in English.” In discussing English and minority-language use in modern American homes, Veltman describes a twentieth-century scenario that seems to also have been common with Danish families in Utah a hundred years ago. Once the children went to school, their English skills developed rapidly, their linguistic values changed, and they no longer wished to speak the minority language at home. The parents either did not resist this movement or, if they did, eventually “abandon[ed] the conflict at some point in time as relatively fruitless.”

Of course, the ultimate form of acceptance and social interaction is marriage, and intermarriage is one of the factors identified as affecting language shift. In Utah, the many mixed nationality neighborhoods, the high level of social acceptance of Danes by Anglo-Americans, and the shared religious background led to many mixed marriages—especially in the second generation. Armstrong reports a dramatic (nearly five-fold) increase in the number of marriages between Scandinavians and Anglo-Americans in one Utah community between 1880 and 1900. In his discussion of “linguistic emigration,” Veltman notes that in the United States, “persons [of
different language backgrounds] who intermarry are likely to adopt the English language as the principle language of use.” This is what normally happened in Utah with these mixed linguistic background couples. There was usually no question about which language they used at home. It was English, and the children did not learn Danish.

Conclusion

Although a large proportion of Danish surnames and some Danish cultural traits live on in modern-day Utah, this sociolinguistic history of the Danish language in the state ends with the demise of the danske sprog so beloved by the pioneer immigrants. As it has done with many other native and immigrant languages since then, and will undoubtedly continue doing, the United States became the “language graveyard” for Danish—at least in Utah. Nevertheless, this history illuminates a largely forgotten aspect of Western and Danish-American life. Along with the oft-told tales of Western settlers’ struggles with the mountain desert climate and the pioneers’ battles with the Indians, the stories of their struggles with, and eventual dominance of the “third enemy” (English) convey an important part of our Danish ancestors’ lives and our heritage.

Acknowledgements: The authors wish to express special thanks to the Utah Humanities Council for providing funding in the form of a Delmont R. Oswald fellowship that helped make this research possible. They also wish to thank the Danish American Heritage Society for providing grant money that enabled George Bailey to travel to Iowa in order to attend the DAHS conference and present this paper.

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