

A diachronic study of the phrase *We are in a completely different place today* in Danish

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a diachronic analysis of the Danish phrase *vi er et helt andet sted i dag* (lit. ‘we are in a completely different place today’), aiming to understand the communication needs driving its prevalent usage. The phrase’s initial appearance in Danish media dates to 1987, but a notable increase in usage is observed from 2010. This surge is linked to Danish organisations, especially banks, utilising the phrase in crisis communication as a “image restoration strategy” (Benoit 1997, 179; Benoit and Pang, 2007, 248). The study questions the phrase’s classification, considering terms like *Wortverbindungsmuster* (Steyer, 2013), *Klischee*, *Idiomatischer Satz* (Stein and Stumpf, 2019), and *situational manipulator* (Szczygłowska, 2023; Wray, 2002). It also explores its origin as a “phraseological Anglicism” (Fiedler, 2023, 58). Using the Danish corpus Infomedia, the research spans 2000–2022, analysing lexical fixedness, thematic domain, style, discourse practice, and mediality (Dalmas *et al.*, 2015). Special focus is given to the phrase’s use in apology contexts and an associated meta-discourse. The findings indicate that the phrase’s evolution typifies key phraseological processes. Its increasing usage has led to lexical fixation in economic discourse, becoming an integral part of apology rhetoric (Lewicki, Polin and Lount, 2016). Concurrently, its establishment in this domain spawns an ironic meta discourse, reducing it to a cliché.

Keywords: phraseology; diachronic analysis; organisational apology; crisis communication.

1. Introduction

This article presents a diachronic, intra-linguistic analysis of the Danish phrase *vi er et helt andet sted i dag*, translating to ‘we are in a completely different place today’. The study investigates the marked increase in frequency and diversity of this phrase’s application in Danish media over the past two decades. Initially appearing in a regional newspaper in 1987¹, the phrase experiences only

1 This initial example is employed by a municipal cultural committee chairman who confronts a group of protesting citizens, asserting: “Tænk, hvis de kræfter, I har sat ind på det her, var

sporadic usage until the early 2000s. The analysis highlights its pronounced prevalence in the latter half of the 2010s, particularly within a distinct discourse context: the issuing of apologies by organisations, notably banks, to the Danish public. This phenomenon suggests that the phrase has evolved into both a reflection and a marker of a distinct communication practice or culture within this context. The increasing use and context of this phrase raise key questions for this study, including if it has become a fixed phrase through lexicalisation, the timeline and dynamics of this process, and the cultural communication needs driving its use. The research aims to explore the relationship between language evolution and cultural communication dynamics. The article begins by defining the object of study and the theoretical framework applied. It then details the data and methodology used. The results section is structured in two parts: initially, it explores lexical fixedness, stylistic register, mediality, and thematic domains; subsequently, it delves into examples from an apology discourse and the associated meta-discourse. It concludes by synthesising the findings.

2. Object of study and applied theory

The phrase that the study examines consists of a nexus, a locative adverbial (*et helt andet sted*, lit. ‘a completely different place’), and a temporal adverbial (*i dag*, lit. ‘today’). Individually, these adverbials carry idiomatic meanings. Historically, *det andet sted* (‘the other place’) has served as a circumlocution or euphemism for something one would prefer not to mention directly, such as *hell* or *the toilet* (ODS). In contemporary Danish, like English, *i dag* (‘today’) can mean ‘in the current time we live in; at this point in time as opposed to in the past’ (DDO). When combined, the nexus and adverbials appear to take on a new meaning, which can be succinctly described as being, at the time of speaking, on the other side of a (drastic) change, in a new state, and in a new era.

In delineating the object of study, the paper adopts the framework of Steyer’s (2013) concept of *usuelle Wortverbindung*, which translates to ‘usual co-occurrences of words’. These are characterised by Steyer as functional units employed in executing distinct communicative tasks and are defined by their frequency of usage (Steyer, 2013, 337). Steyer distinguishes between *Wortverbindungen* (‘co-occurrences’), which are comprised of fixed lexical elements, and *Wortverbindungsmuster* (‘co-occurrence patterns’), characterised as polylexical, lexically partially specified structures with fixed components and open slots for variable elements (Steyer, 2013, 42–50, 338).

blevet sat ind i en positiv retning. Så havde vi stået *et helt andet sted i dag*’ (‘Imagine if all the effort you’ve put into this had been directed positively. Then we would be *in a completely different place today*.’ (- *Vi var nok for hurtige til at tage buskortene*, Vejle Amts Folkeblad, p. 23, 9.3.1987. <https://labs.statsbiblioteket.dk/smurf/>; accessed 20.5.2023. Emphasis added).

Additionally, this study incorporates the concept of the *idiomatischer Satz* ('idiomatic sentence') as developed by Finkbeiner (2008), and Stein and Stumpf (2019), defining it as a syntactically fixed, semantically idiomatic, and pragmatically constrained unit (Stein and Stumpf, 2019, 78). The term *idiomatischer Satz* emphasises that it primarily concerns a fixed expression in terms of form and meaning. Conversely, a concept that emphasises the pragmatic assessment of the language's effect in the situation is Wray's concept of a "situation manipulator" (Wray 2002, 88; cp. Szczygłowska, 2023). While Wray (2002) defines *situation manipulator* as formulaic sequences that "influence the hearer in some way or another", the relevant subtype here includes those used to "get the hearer to do something, feel something, or think something, to the benefit of the speaker's physical, emotional, or cognitive needs", which encompasses the apology (Wray, 2002, 88–89). The paper also examines the notion of *Klischee* (Stein and Stumpf, 2019, 76), referring to phrases or buzzword-like constructions that become ineffective through overuse and attract linguistic criticism.

Moreover, the analysis extends to the origins of the specific expression under scrutiny, potentially characterised as a "phraseological Anglicism", as discussed by Fiedler (2023, 58). The significant influence of English on Danish, including its phraseology, has been well-documented (Gottlieb, 2020; Sørensen, 1995, 1997). Investigating the phrase in question may provide insights into the motivations for integrating loan translations from English into Danish.

The degree of lexicalisation is intrinsically associated with the concept of *Musterhaftigkeit* (Stein and Stumpf, 2019, 19; Steyer, 2013, 39) – 'patterning' or 'patternedness'. This term encompasses characteristics such as recurrence, conventionality, historicity, and reproducibility, which are indicative of a word's or phrase's adaptability across various situations and its potential transformation within individual and social usage (Stein and Stumpf, 2019, 19). Such a characterisation necessitates a diachronic exploration of frequency and fixedness, as well as of the practical application of the term under investigation. In the context of this study, the pragmatic approach proposed by Dalmas *et al.* (2015) for the analysis of adjectives is particularly pertinent. Their methodology focuses on discerning unique attributes of adjectives through five distinctive parameters: lexical preferences, thematic domains, stylistic register, discourse practices, and mediality (Dalmas *et al.*, 2015, 13). This approach is aligned with a usage-based view, which is essential for examining the phrase in question.

The employment of the phrase within the specific discourse practice of apology, as observed in the selected material, has steered the theoretical orientation towards corporate communication, encompassing crisis communication and, more precisely, the genre of apology. Consequently, this study is informed by rhetorical communication theories, with a primary focus on Benoit and Pang's image repair theory (Benoit, 1997; Benoit and Pang, 2007). Benoit and Pang (2007) highlight that an image repair effort may become essential when an

organisation faces an attack threatening its image. They posit two fundamental prerequisites for defining such an attack: firstly, an offensive act must have occurred, and secondly, the accused must bear responsibility for that act (Benoit and Pang, 2007, 246).

Image repair theory delineates five strategies to mitigate image threats: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit and Pang, 2007, 248). Notably, the strategy of mortification involves attempts to rehabilitate an image by soliciting forgiveness or issuing apologies (Benoit and Pang, 2007, 248). Of particular interest for the analysis of the phrase *we are in a different place today* is this fifth strategy. According to Lewicki *et al.* (2016, 183), the apology genre can include up to six components: an expression of regret, an explanation of the misconduct, acknowledgment of responsibility, a declaration of repentance, an offer to repair the harm, and a request for forgiveness. The declaration of repentance is described as “a statement in which the violators express their promise to not repeat the offense” (Lewicki *et al.*, 2016, 183). This framework informs the analysis of the phrase in question, providing a lens through which its usage in the context of apology can be understood and its efficacy in crisis communication can be assessed.

3. Data and methodology

In the study, I utilised Infomedia, a comprehensive Danish media database that archives content from 2,648 national and local media sources dating back to 1990. These cover a broad range of media types, including 21 national daily newspapers, 88 regional and local daily newspapers, and 466 local weekly newspapers. Additionally, it contains 655 magazines, 14 news agencies, 1,236 online sources, 30 TV broadcasts, 124 radio programmes, and 14 other sources (Infomedia, 10.1.2023). My search spanned the period from January 1st, 2000, to December 31st, 2022. During the search, I focused on the phrase *et helt andet sted i dag* (lit. ‘a completely different place today’). This query yielded 1,501 hits. To refine the dataset, I filtered out duplicates and instances where the phrase was used in a literal sense, ultimately narrowing the results down to 489 relevant occurrences.

Following the initial data collection, I employed a coding methodology based on Dalmas’ five criteria to analyse the usage of the phrase. These criteria include lexical fixedness, stylistic register, thematic domain, mediality, and discourse practice. Emphasising a bottom-up, data-driven approach as advocated by Steyer (2013), I developed sub-categories directly derived from the observed data patterns.

4. Results

Quantitatively, there is a consistent increase in the use of the phrase over the examined period. In the first years of the period, from 2000 to 2009, it is used on average only 3 times annually. In the years 2010–2017, it averages 17 times annually, and in the years 2018–2022, it averages 65 times per year, with a peak in 2022 of a total of 82 occurrences.

Lexical fixedness. Regarding lexical fixedness, two different syntactic patterns can be observed in the material. The first is a simple pattern consisting only of a nexus with a finite verb and subject, plus the two lexical anchors. The finite verb is in the present tense. This simple pattern may be expanded with optional adverbs, but fundamentally consists of four slots:

Table 1. Simple pattern²

1	2			3	4	
<i>vi</i>	<i>er</i>	<i>heldigvis</i>	<i>også</i>	<i>et helt andet sted</i>	<i>i dag</i>	<i>end da krisen ramte</i>
'we'	'are'	'fortunately'	'also'	'in a completely different place'	'today'	'than when the crisis hit'
Subject	Finite verb	Disjunctive adverbial	Conjunctive adverbial	Locative adverbial	Temporal adverbial	Comparative clause/adverbial
Obligatory	Obligatory	Optional	Optional	Fixed	Fixed	Optional

The second pattern includes, as a mandatory element, a conditional clause, nexus with a verb in the conditional mood, and the two lexical anchors. This pattern can be expanded with a variety of adverbs and can consist of up to 11 components when fully developed:

Table 2. Expanded pattern³

1		2	3			2b	4	5		
<i>Hvis Vesten havde udfaset sin dybe afhængighed af fossile brændstoffer inden Putins invasion</i>	(<i>så</i>)	<i>ville</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>nok</i>	(<i>også</i>)	<i>være</i>	<i>et helt andet sted</i>	<i>i dag</i>	(<i>end vi er</i>)	<i>både sikkerhedspolitisk, klimapolitisk og økonomisk</i>
'If the West had phased out its deep dependence on fossil fuels before Putin's invasion'	'(then)'	'would'	'we'	'probably'	'(also)'	'be'	'in a very different place'	'today'	'(than we are)'	'in terms of security, climate policy and economics'
Conditional clause/adverbial	Conjunction	Subject	Finite verb	Disjunctive adverbial	Conjunctive adverbial	Non-finite verb	Locative adverbial	Temporal adverbial	Comparative clause/adverbial	Conditional adverbial
Obligatory	Optional	Obligatory	Obligatory	Optional	Optional	Obligatory	Fixed	Fixed	Optional	Optional

Quantitatively, 84% of the occurrences follow the simple pattern, while 16% follow the expanded pattern.

An analysis of the subject forms within the dataset reveals that the most commonly occurring subject is the first-person plural pronoun 'we' (43%). Following this, the second most prevalent category comprises nominal elements in the third-person singular. These subjects exhibit considerable diversity, ranging from geographical entities such as a city, a state, *EU* ('the European Union'),

2 JP Aarhus, 17 March 2022; Borsen.dk, 31 October 2017.

3 Information.dk, 7 September 2022.

Europa ('Europe'), or *verden* ('the world'), to concrete nouns within an economic context, including industry, company, and product. Additionally, abstract nouns like *idé* ('idea'), *diskussion* ('discussion'), *debat* ('debate'), and *virkeligheden* ('the reality') are also represented.

In terms of verb usage, the verb *at være* (*to be*) emerges as the most frequently employed (79%). Accompanying this primary verb are others such as *at ligge* ('to lie'), *at sidde* ('to sit'), and *at se sig selv* ('to see oneself')⁴, which predominantly signify a state or position. A smaller subset of verbs is observed that denote initiation or inception, exemplified by *at begynde* ('to begin') and *at starte* ('to start'):

(1) Men alligevel peger det på muligheder, som vi ikke har haft før. De unge *begynder et helt andet sted i dag*. Der er 100 ting, man kan blive, og somme tider kan man være 50 ting på en dag. ('But still, it points to opportunities we haven't had before. Young people *start from a completely different place today*. There are a hundred things one can become – and sometimes, you can be fifty things in a single day.') (Morsø Folkeblad, 23 April 2008)⁵

On the opposite end, verbs that imply a metaphorical conclusion or culmination, such as *at ende* ('to end') or *at havne* ('to end up'), are also found:

(2) Selv er han ikke i tvivl om, at han *var havnet et helt andet sted i dag*, hvis ikke han som ung havde haft Fyns Motor Sport og Højbjergbanen til at brænde ungdommens vildskab af på. ('As for himself, he has no doubt that he *would have ended up in a completely different place today* if, as a young man, he hadn't had Fyns Motor Sport and the Højbjerg track to burn off the wildness of youth.') (Fyensstiftstidende.dk, 13 October 2001)

These verbs play a crucial role in highlighting the development or significant transformation conveyed by the phrase.

In the realm of adverbial variation, a distinction can be made among three functional categories of adverbs: a) disjuncts, b) conjuncts, and c) adjuncts:

(3) Vi er i Verdo (a) *beldignis et helt andet sted i dag*. ('We are, at Verdo, (a) *fortunately* in a completely different place today. (Jyllands-Posten, 29 August 2022)

(4) Derfor står verden (b) *også et helt andet sted i dag* (c) *end i 1930'erne*. ('That's why the world is (b) *also* in a completely different place today (c) *than it was in the 1930s*.) (Politiken, 7 February 2009)

4 Den allerstørste udfordring i fremtiden *ligger et helt andet sted i dag* (lit. 'The biggest challenge in the future lies in a completely different place today'), Horsens Folkeblad, 2 June 2007. Hvis jeg ikke havde haft det [opmuntring], så havde jeg *siddet et helt andet sted i dag* (lit. 'If I hadn't had that [encouragement], I would sit in a completely different place today'), Sn.dk, 23 August 2018. Jeg kan jo *se mig selv et helt andet sted i dag* (lit. 'I can clearly see myself in a completely different place today'), Seoghoer.dk, 28 September 2021.

5 Emphasis added. All examples have been translated by the author, with partial assistance from Google Translate and ChatGPT.

Disjuncts, such as ‘fortunately’, serve to convey the speaker’s attitude toward the content of the statement. These adverbs are intriguing because they not only express the speaker’s certainty in making the statement but also the value they attribute to its content. This aspect is especially relevant in evaluative utterances.

A semantic categorisation of the phrase reveals a nuanced distribution across three scenarios. Firstly, it is predominantly employed to denote positive developments, constituting over 80% of its usage. This usage highlights transitions to more favorable states resulting from specific actions, underscoring improvements or advancements from initial conditions.

(5) Tænker vi tilbage på de bekymringer, som verden havde til den skrøbelige økonomiske genopretning ved årets start - især risikoen for inflation i Asien og for gæld i Europa - ja, så står vi et helt andet sted i dag. (‘If we think back to the concerns the world had about the fragile economic recovery at the beginning of the year – especially the risk of inflation in Asia and debt in Europe – well, then we are in a completely different place today.’) (Berlingske, 17 March 2011)

Secondly, about 10% of its application depicts negative developments, portraying deteriorations or setbacks due to improper actions, thus emphasising a decline from the original state:

(6) – Danionics skulle have indgået en alliance om produktion af batterier i Asien meget tidligere. Var det sket, er jeg overbevist om, at selskabet havde været et helt andet sted i dag, mener Rune Møller. (‘Danionics should have formed an alliance for battery production in Asia much earlier. Had that happened, I’m convinced the company would have been in a completely different place today, says Rune Møller.’) (Computerworld Top 100, 24 September 2004)

Finally, a smaller portion, approximately 7.5%, falls into the category of neutral observation, representing objective acknowledgments of change:

(7) Vi kommer fra et mediemarked, hvor man tidligere i høj grad hørte til hos ét medie som læser, men vi er et helt andet sted i dag. (‘We come from a media landscape where people used to belong primarily to a single outlet as readers, but we are in a completely different place today.’) (Mediawatch, 7 October 2015)

Observed over time, the use of the phrase to signify positive development predominates.

Stylistic register. Regarding the stylistic register, at first glance, the diaphasic range within the analysed texts appears to be rather limited: they are all press-related texts, ranging from a press interview to an editorial. However, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of the examples featuring the phrase are in direct speech (cp. ex. 8), accounting for 65%. Additionally, 13% are in indirect

speech (cp. ex. 9). This suggests that the phrase is predominantly associated with spoken language. Several texts, especially about organisations, are press releases from these entities, often directly adopted by the media. These texts frequently use direct, possibly fabricated, CEO quotations to add a personal, immediate, and emotional tone (cp. ex. 8).

(8) – Jeg er et helt andet sted i dag, end jeg var dengang, siger en smilende Thomas Raunsbæk, direktør i Scandi Byg, til Licitationen - Byggeriets Dagblad. (‘I’m in a completely different place today than I was back then, says a smiling T.R., CEO of Scandi Byg, to Licitationen, the construction industry magazine.’) (Licitationen. Byggeriets Dagblad, 29 October 2018)

(9) Fordi den moderne lighedsdiskussion ifølge Mette Frederiksen er et helt andet sted i dag. (‘Because, according to Mette Frederiksen, the contemporary discussion about equality is in a completely different place today.’) (Jyllands-Posten, 26 March 2012)

Over time, the phrase’s use in direct speech has increased, accounting for 50% of its occurrences by the study’s end, indicating a shift towards more personal and immediate communication, and a preference for spoken over written contexts.

Mediality. The media analysis shows the phrase is most common in national newspapers (both print and online) (39%), followed by local/regional newspapers (29%), and then in trade journals (18%), with clear temporal variations. From 2011 to 2015, the phrase appeared more in national than in local/regional newspapers, a trend that intensified by 2019. Starting in 2015, it also began to feature in national radio and TV broadcasts. From 2013, its use in local/regional newspapers steadily increased, nearly matching national newspaper levels by 2022. The phrase’s usage in trade journals, especially in economics, marketing, financial regulation, and compliance, notably surged in 2018. Since there is no available calculation of the quantitative distribution of Infomedia’s database content – only a listing of the number of included media types – the correlation between these percentages and the underlying data volume remains uncertain. However, this distribution may reflect differing editorial orientations and communicative functions across media types. The relatively high frequency in national newspapers suggests that the phrase often features in politically or rhetorically charged narratives that aim to frame developments in evaluative terms. In contrast, its growing use in local and regional outlets may point to a more pragmatic adoption of the phrase in community-based reporting, where it is used to highlight change over time or local progress. The increase in trade journals further indicates that the phrase is not limited to general public discourse but has found relevance in professional and regulatory contexts, especially where strategic positioning or transformation is emphasised.

Thematic domains. In examining the thematic domains of the phrase's usage, a fundamental dichotomy emerges between contexts related to the private and social spheres. Quantitatively, approximately 13% of instances fall into the former category, while a significant majority, about 87%, pertain to the latter. In private contexts, the phrase captures personal transformation stories, charting progress from negative to positive states, such as illness to health, abuse to recovery, crime to reintegration, and extremism to democratic citizenship. In contrast, the social sphere covers a wider range of themes across five domains: economy, politics, culture, sports, and health. Within these, the economic domain is preeminent, accounting for nearly 40% of the phrase's occurrences. Political themes, often dominated by discussions on climate change, the European Union, and the conflict in Ukraine, represent 19%. Cultural topics, which include diverse subjects such as film, music, education, food, and IT/digitalisation constitute about 18% of instances. Additionally, sports emerge as a distinct category, linking to 9% of the phrases. Concurrently, the health domain gains prominence in 2020 and 2021, a trend likely attributable to the coronavirus pandemic. The economic domain shows a particularly marked rise in usage around 2017, peaking in 2019, followed by a slight decline in 2020 and 2021, before experiencing renewed growth in 2022. This pattern coincides with increasing public and political attention to high-profile money-laundering cases involving major Danish banks⁶. In this context, the phrase is frequently used to signal awareness of the need for reform and accountability, often framing the financial sector as an area that has either moved – or is expected to move – to “a completely different place”. These functions are examined in more detail in the following section.

5. Examples from two discourse practices

In analysing articles pertaining to private organisations (26%, n: 127), a distinction emerges between two primary communication strategies: corporate branding or face-protective communication (6%, n: 28), and crisis communication aimed at image restoration (20%, n: 99).

Corporate branding or face-protective texts typically portray a positive status quo within an organisation as the culmination of a period of growth or prosperity. This narrative serves to distance the current, more developed and trustworthy state of the organisation from its less developed past. These texts

6 Two illustrative examples are Danske Bank's 2018 acknowledgment of serious deficiencies in anti-money laundering compliance related to approximately EUR 200 billion in transactions through its Estonian branch (Danske Bank, 2018, 6), and Nordea Bank Denmark's 2016 police report for failing to maintain adequate anti-money laundering procedures (Finanstilsynet, 2016).

primarily focus on aspects such as economic consolidation, product development, and the establishment of collaborations.

Conversely, texts centered on image restoration explicitly refer to a previous negative position or situation. These may include public criticism, employment issues, or economic difficulties faced by the organisation. Notably, 11% (n: 55) of all texts analysed fall under the apology genre, with 9% (n: 43) involving banks as the apologising entity⁷. In these contexts, the phrase crystallises into a fixed form, typically employing the first-person plural subject and a finite verb, exemplified by the condensed expression “we are in a completely different place today”. Furthermore, this phrase begins to embody the meaning attributed by Lewicki *et al.* (2016) to the declaration of repentance in an apology. It signifies not only a distancing from the organisation’s past but also an expression of a morally integrity-based change within the organisation. An illustrative example can be seen in the communication from a publicly criticized bank that was charged with violating anti-money laundering legislation in 2018:

(10) «Vi har fejlet og ikke gjort det godt nok. Det vil vi gerne undskylde for. Der er nok nogle kunder og danskere, som ikke har hørt det ordentligt endnu, og til dem vil vi gerne sige, at vi godt ved, at vi ikke har levet op til omverdenens og vores egne forventninger, og derfor siger vi undskyld,» siger Jesper Nielsen, adm. direktør i Danske Bank siden den 1. oktober i år [...] Sagen har presset jeres troværdighed ned til et historisk lavpunkt. Hvad gør I ved det? «Vi kan godt forstå, at det forholder sig sådan. Det sker, når man ikke lever op til folks forventninger, hvilket vi ikke har gjort. Derfor forsøger vi nu – ud over at sige undskyld – at forklare, at *vi er et helt andet sted i dag.*» (“We have failed and have not done well enough. We would like to apologize for that. There are probably some customers and Danes who haven’t properly heard this yet, and to them we want to say that we are fully aware we haven’t lived up to the expectations of the public or our own – and that is why we say sorry,” says Jesper Nielsen, CEO of Danske Bank since October 1 this year.[...] The case has driven your credibility to a historic low. What are you doing about it? “We understand why that is the case. It happens when you don’t meet people’s expectations – which we haven’t. That’s why, in addition to apologising, we are now trying to explain that *we are in a completely different place today.*”) (Jyllands-Posten 12 October 2018)

The example displays three characteristics identified by Lewicki *et al.* (2016): expression of regret, acknowledgment of responsibility, and declaration of repentance, which the phrase is used as a concluding point on. This binding to a particular genre reinforces the routine formulaic nature of the phrase and emphasises its importance in the context of organisational apology communication.

7 In addition to Danish banks and credit companies (Danske Bank, Nordea, Sydbank, Arbejdernes Landsbank, Danmarks Nationalbank, Nykredit), the phrase is also used in a Danish context in connection with Swedbank, Deutsche Bank, and the ECB.

From 2017, a development in the usage of the expression can be observed, as it is used as a metareference to apologies from banks. This development signifies the rise of a new discourse, which can be characterised as the critical citations or discussions of the phrase within analytical journalism. The phrase is dismissed with the words, *det lyder ikke overbevisende* (lit. ‘that doesn’t sound convincing’ (Berlingske, 6.3.2019); it is labeled *papegøjesnak* (lit. ‘parrot talk’, see below) or derided as *a mantra, [...] gentaget til hudløshed* (‘a mantra repeated ad nauseam’ (lit.: ‘skinlessness’)) (Weekendavisen, 23.11.2018). This trend suggests that the phrase is increasingly perceived as a cliché:

(11) Men, for nu at citere den *papegøjesnak*, som Nordeas kommunikationsfolk åbenlyst har instrueret bankens chefer på samtlige niveauer i alle geografier om at klamre sig til, når talen falder på hvidvask: ‘*Vi er et andet sted i dag.*’ Ja. *I er i sandhed et helt andet sted.* [...] storbankernes eksistentielle krise er langtfra forbi. Ingen ved, hvor eller hvornår den ender. Men vi ved, at det er ‘*et helt andet sted end i dag.*’ (‘But, to quote the *parrot talk* that Nordea’s communications team has clearly instructed the bank’s executives at all levels and in every geography to cling to whenever the subject of money laundering comes up: ‘*We are in a different place today.*’ Yes. *You truly are in a completely different place.* [...] The existential crisis of the big banks is far from over. No one knows where or when it will end. But we do know that it will be ‘*a completely different place*’ than today.’) (Jyllands-Posten, 4 May 2019)

6. Conclusion

This diachronic analysis of the Danish phrase *vi er et helt andet sted i dag* (‘we are in a completely different place today’) reveals that, following its initial appearance in the Danish press in 1987 and only sporadic use until around 2010, the phrase undergoes a fixation process. This process establishes it as both a simple and an extended pattern, which can be aptly described as co-occurrence patterns (Steyer, 2013). However, with its integration into the specialised discourse in the economic domain, especially in the latter half of the period, it increasingly seems to assume some of the characteristics that define both an idiomatic sentence (Finkbeiner, 2008) and a situational manipulator (Wray, 2002). The concise, lexicalised form becomes an expression of remorse, serving as a face-saving mechanism and linked to the genre of organisational apology. It can be observed that the negative connotations historically attributed to “the other place” give way to associations of a positive development. This establishment, however, is met with responses in the analytically critical press, which creates a metadiscourse in which quotation and repetition act as markers of irony, thereby reducing the phrase to a recognisable cliché (cf. ex. 11 above). Fiedler (2023) questions whether our repertoires of phrases are becoming increasingly similar due to English borrowings. Regarding the phrase in question, a simple search in the TenTen2020 corpora on Sketch Engine shows that it is used in both

British and American English, (Swiss) German, and French, similarly to its use in Danish. It could be a topic for further investigation to see if the phrase has undergone the same development in these languages as it has in Danish.

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