Alla önskas hjärtligt välkomna till följande öppna seminarium vid Centrum för tvåspråkighetsforskning.

Högre seminariet

i tvåspråkighetsforskning

Tisdag 6 september kl. 15.00–16.30 i rum D480

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The social meaning of rhythm in Stockholm’s vernacular -
Vowel durational contrast in adjacent syllables is a stratified indexical feature

Abstract

This study is a sociophonetic analysis of eight speech stimuli that were assessed by two separate listener groups. Assessments of ‘Swedishness’ and ‘refinement’ were made with Likert scales, and linguistic variables were statistically modeled against those assessments. Among all the linguistic variables within the 30-second speech stimuli, the durational contrast of vowels in adjacent syllables (for example, ö and o in förort) was the most significant in predicting listener assessments. The results contribute to the growing research on urban vernacular in Sweden’s multilingual communities, often known as Rinkeby Swedish, Suburban Swedish, or Swedish on Multilingual Ground (SMG). The study empirically substantiates the quite common—yet scientifically vague—impression by researchers and the general population that the variety has a jerky or staccato-like rhythm (Kotsinas, 1988:267; Bijvoet & Fraurud, 2016:22; among others).

Eight stimuli were made from recordings of eight men from Stockholm’s racialized working class while they made a table reservation at an exclusive restaurant on the phone. Listener group 1 was aided by the Likert scale in Figure 1, and listener group 2 was aided by the Likert scale in Figure 2.

![Figure 1. Likert scale for listener group 1 (n=14)](image1)

![Figure 2. Likert scale for listener group 2 (n=13)](image2)
The phonetic patterns within the speech stimuli were thoroughly examined. A linear regression analysis revealed that the durational contrast between vowels in adjacent syllables, measured by the normalized pairwise variability index for vowels (nPVI-V, Low, Grabe & Nolan, 2000), predicted the Likert scores for both listener groups much more strongly than any other linguistic variable. Stockholm’s multiethnolect has less durational contrast between vowels in adjacent syllables than conventional styles, which confirms the staccato rhythm.

Aside from substantiating the long-held impression of rhythm, two theoretical contributions emerge from this study. Firstly, a post-hoc analysis revealed that nPVI-V is not an effect of a specific vowel or vowel-class transformation. This supports the idea that the “rhythmic grid can be constructed prior to [its] segmental representations” (anon. reviewer, 2016), which is a familiar hypothesis within Psycholinguistics (Grosjean & Gee, 1987). Secondly, the nPVI-V measurements do not fall into two discrete groups; rather, they are incremental. As durational contrast grows, increased valuations of ‘Swedishness’ and ‘refinement’ are indexed. This incremental indexicality is a straightforward challenge to the conventional idea of discrete ‘lects’ and supports Benor’s (2010) concept of ethnolinguistic repertoire.

References


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Caroline Kerfoot