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Abstract:

Quantity has been considered one of the most salient social markers in Helsinki Swedish (Reuter 1982:197). Extra long consonants in stressed V:C syllables have been characteristic for the speech of upper class Swedish in Helsinki. In contrast, rural Finland-Swedish dialects are characterized by very short consonant durations in V:C sequences. The long consonant durations in Helsinki as well as the short consonant durations in rural dialects differ from quantity patterns of Swedish spoken in Sweden and both seem to be a result of language contact with Finnish.

Acoustic measurements of phonetic quantity so far only exist for highly educated speakers from Helsinki (Reuter 1982) and for rural Finland-Swedish dialects (Schaeffler 2005). The aim of this paper is to study phonetic quantity in Swedish spoken in four cities in Finland. The four cities have different demographic language structures. In Helsingfors (fi. Helsinki) and Åbo (fi. Turku) only 5-6% of the population are Swedish-speaking. Vasa (fi. Vaasa) has a Swedish minority of 25% and is surrounded by a dominantly Swedish-speaking countryside. Mariehamn on the Åland Islands is dominantly Swedish (89%). Spontaneous speech data from 46 speakers in two age groups and with different social background were analysed.

The results show significant differences across the four cities. Vowel duration is the most important cue for discriminating between V:C and VC: sequences in the southern cities, which means that consonant duration can be used as a social marker. In Vasa, on the other hand, vowel duration as well as consonant duration is used for differentiating V:C and VC: sequences. In Åbo, there is a significant difference between older and younger speakers. While the older speakers are characterized by long consonant durations in V:C syllables, similar to the durational data from Helsinki, younger speakers from Åbo have markedly shorter consonant durations resembling those of the Vasa speakers.

References:

Reuter, M. 1982. Kvantitet i Helsingforssvenskan. Licentiate thesis, Helsinki University.
Schaeffler, F. 2005. Phonological quantity in Swedish dialects: typological aspects, phonetic variation and diachronic change. Ph.D. thesis, Umeå University.