The sound of 'Swedish on multilingual ground'

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The sound of 'Swedish on Multilingual Ground'

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Abstract

In the present paper, recordings of 'Swedish on multilingual ground' from three different cities in Sweden are compared and discussed.

Introduction

In Sweden, an increasing number of adolescents speak Swedish in new, foreign-sounding ways. These new ways of speaking Swedish are primarily found in the cities. The overarching purpose of the research project *Language and language use among young people in multilingual urban settings* is to describe and analyze these new Swedish varieties (hereafter referred to as 'Swedish on multilingual ground', SMG) in Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm.

Most SMG varieties are known by names that reveal where they are spoken: "Rinkeby Swedish" in Rinkeby, Stockholm, "Gårdstenska" in Gårdstena, Gothenburg and "Rosengård Swedish" in Rosengård, Malmö. However, if you discuss Rinkeby Swedish with young people in Malmö, they will instantly associate with Rosengård Swedish (i.e. with the corresponding Malmö SMG variety), if you play examples of Rosengård Swedish to teenagers in Lund, they will associate with the Lund SMG variety "Fladden" (named after Norra Fäladen), and so on. In other words, obvious similarities are perceived between different varieties of SMG.

Purpose

In the present paper, a first comparison between SMG materials recorded in Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm is undertaken with the object of searching for differences and similarities in the varieties' phonology and phonetics.

Previous research

Descriptions in the literature of so-called ethic accents or (multi) ethnolects of different languages reveal some similarities. One example of such a similarity is a staccato-like rhythm or syllable-timing. A staccato-like rhythm has been observed in e.g. Rinkeby Swedish (Kotsinas 1990), in the so-called Nuuk Danish spoken by monolingual Danish-speaking adolescents in Greenland (Jacobsen 2000) and in the so-called multi-ethnolect of adolescents in Copenhagen (Quist 2000). In some other language varieties that have developed through language contact, e.g. Nigarian English (Udofot 2003), Maori English (Holmes & Ainsworth 1996) and Singapore English (Low & Grabe 1995), the speech rhythm has been described as approaching syllable-timing. However, in the present paper, we will restrict ourselves to investigating the similarities (and differences) between three varieties of SMG.

Method

The material comes from the speech database collected by the research project *Language and language use among young people in multilingual urban settings*.

During the academic year 2002-2003, the project collected a large amount of comparable data in schools in Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm. The speakers are young people (mainly 17-year-olds) who attended the second year of the upper secondary school's educational program in social science during 2002-2003.

The recordings are comprised of both scripted and spontaneous speech. The recordings include: (01) interviews between a project member and the participating pupils, (02) oral presentations given by the participating pupils, (03) class-room recordings, (04) pupil group discussions, and (05) recordings made by the pupils themselves (at home, during the lunch break, at cafés, etc.).

The recordings were made with portable minidisk recorders (SHARP MD-MT190) and electret condenser microphones (SONY ECM-717), and subsequently digitized.

The naturalness of the speech material has been obtained on the expense of good sound quality. Acoustic analyses using the speech analysis programs WaveSurfer and Praat have been undertaken when possible, other parts of the material have primarily been examined using auditory analyses.

Results

In the following, we will restrict ourselves to describing a small set of SMG features that demonstrate interesting differences and similarities between the cities.

Segmentals

ɕ and tʃ

When we ran a perception experiment in Malmö with the object of investigating whom of our informants spoke Rosengård Swedish (Hansson & Svensson 2004), we noted that one of the stimuli contained something typical for SMG at the very beginning of the recording. Instead of listening to the entire 30 second long stimulus, the listeners (adolescents from Malmö) marked their answer after having heard only the first two prosodic phrases (approximately 6.5 seconds). The two phrases in question are given in (1).

(1) ja(g) ska gå å plugga lite nu̩ | asså hon checkar språket å sånt̩ |

Apart from the phrase *å sånt* 'and stuff' which adolescents in Malmö perceive as particularly common in Rosengård Swedish, the pronunciation of the word *checkar* 'checks' stands out as being non-representative of the Malmö dialect. The first sound in *checkar*, /ɕ/, is pronounced with the affricate [tʃ]. Although not a non-existent sound in Swedish dialects, it is perceived as foreign in the Malmö dialect, and, by the listeners in the perception experiment, as a typical feature of SMG. The same sound can be heard in the materials recorded in Gothenburg and Stockholm, e.g. in words like *chillar* [tʃɪlːar] 'chill' and other borrowings.

R sounds

If you ask a Scanian to imitate Rosengård Swedish, he or she will most likely use front r sounds. Indeed, among the SMG speakers in Malmö, the pronunciation of the r sound varies greatly. Out of the ten stimuli perceived as Rosengård Swedish, front r sounds can be heard in five. Among them, there are both fricative and approximant r sounds and the more perceptually salient trilled r sounds.

Also in the Stockholm SMG material, the r sounds differ from the regional dialect in that trilled r sounds appear to be used more frequently. Finally, trilled r sounds can be heard in the Gothenburg SMG material, although here it is not evident that they are more numerous than in the Gothenburg dialect in general.

Prosody

Word accents

It is a well known fact that L2 learners of Swedish find it difficult to perceive and produce the word accent distinction. Given the close relation between foreign accent and SMG, one possible common feature of the SMG varieties is a lack of word accent distinction.

Phonetically, the difference between accent I and II is one of F0 peak timing. The F0 peak of accent I has an earlier alignment with the stressed syllable than accent II. In the Malmö dialect, the F0 peak is found at the beginning of the stressed syllable in accent I words, and at the end in accent II words. The same pattern can be seen in examples of Rosengård Swedish, see Figure 1.

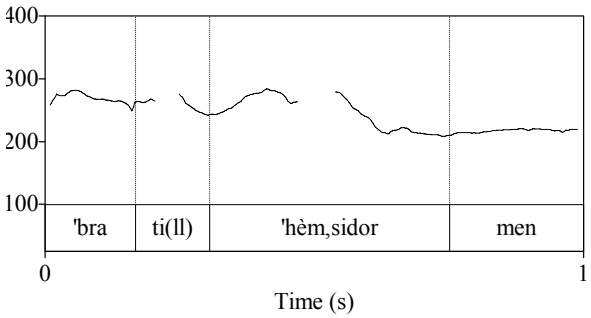

Figure 1. F0 contour of speaker C41's production of the accent I word *bra* 'good' and the accent II word *hemsidor* 'home pages'.

In Stockholm Swedish, the F0 peak is found at the end of the stressed syllable in focussed accent I words. In focussed accent II words, two F0 peaks are found: one at the beginning of the stressed vowel and another one later (midways between the preceding peak and the next accent or boundary tone or, in compounds, in association with the secondary stress). A first look at the Stockholm SMG data reveals that a word accent distinction is used, but it also reveals some deviating patterns. Perceptually prominent accent II words are, e.g., not always assigned two F0 peaks (the focal rise is missing), see Figure 2.

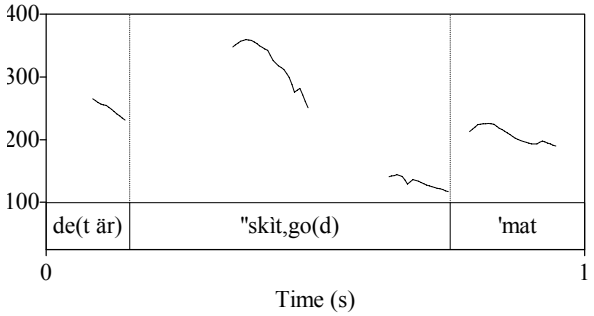

Figure 2. F0 contour of speaker L31's production of the accent II word *skitgod* 'very good'.

The word accents in the Gothenburg SMG material still remain to be investigated.

Intonation

An expanded F0 range can be observed in utterances recorded in all three cities. The pattern is found mainly in exclamations and rhetorical questions, see Figures 3, 4 and 5.

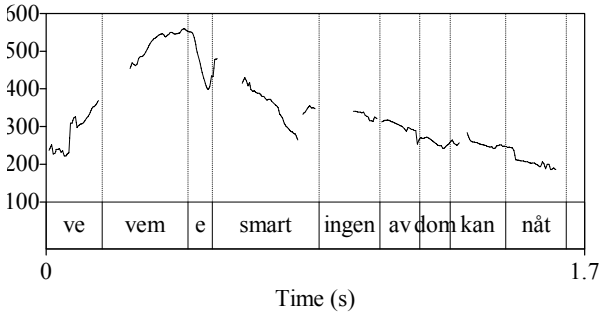

Figure 3. F0 contour of speaker P11's production of *ve- vem e smart* 'wh- who is clever' with an expanded F0 range and, for comparison, *ingen av dom kan nåt* 'either of them know anything' (male speaker from Gothenburg).

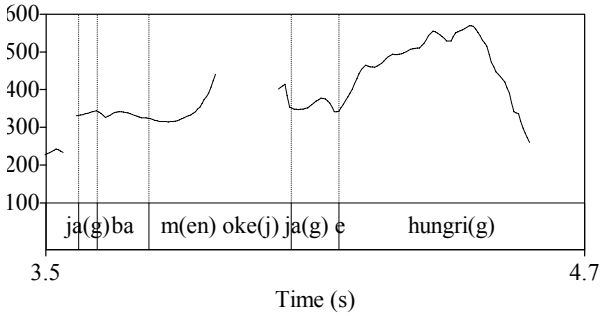

Figure 4. F0 contour of speaker L31's production of *jag e hungrig* 'I'm hungry' with an expanded F0 range and, for comparison, *jag ba men okej* 'I just okay' (female speaker from Stockholm).

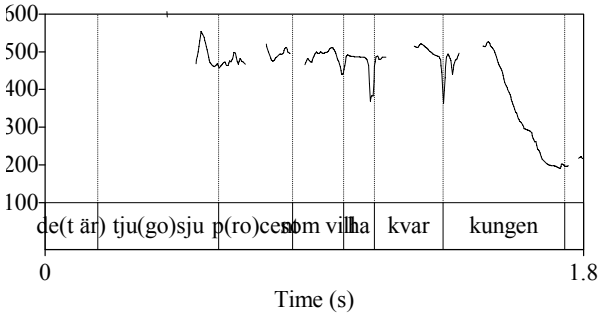

Figure 5. F0 contour of speaker D40's production of *det är tjugosju procent som vill ha kvar kungen* 'it's twenty-seven percent that want to keep the king' with an expanded F0 range (female speaker from Malmö).

In summary, the SMG varieties have both features in common and regional features.

Discussion

How come there are similarities?

How come the different SMG varieties share the above-mentioned features? The relation to learner language and foreign accent is of course obvious in both Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm, but a foreign accent can sound in a multitude of different ways.

One possible explanation is, of course, that all SMG varieties are influenced by the same language or language family. On the other hand, SMG does not sound as one particular foreign accent. Another possible explanation is that the varieties are characterized by features that are typologically unmarked and frequent in the world's languages. It is either related to the fact that many of those features exist in the teenagers' first languages, or to the fact that simplification and usage of unmarked features is generally favored in language contact situations (regardless of what the languages in contact are). A third explanation is that it is features in the Swedish language that give rise to the varieties' similar 'sound', e.g. the difficulties encountered when learning Swedish.

All three alternatives probably have some explicative power, although either completely accounts for why the varieties sound like they do. Word accents are unusual in the speakers' first languages, tend to disappear in language contact situations (as in Finland Swedish), and are difficult for second language learners to learn. A word accent distinction is, nevertheless, maintained in SMG.

A forth explanation is given by the 'gravity model of diffusion' (Trudgill 1974) or the 'cascade model' (Labov 2003): language change spreads from the largest to the next largest city, and so progressively downwards (i.e. by so-called city-hopping). In other words, the similarities among the SMG varieties can be explained as the result of a spreading of SMG from city to city (i.e. from Stockholm to Gothenburg, from Gothenburg to Malmö, and so on). A spreading from city to city rather than a spreading in a more wave-like pattern does not assume acceptance of the spreading features in the rural areas between the cities. The model thereby explains why SMG cannot be found among young people everywhere between Stockholm and Malmö.

What mechanism produces sufficient contact among speakers from different cities for the spreading to occur? Labov (2003) discusses two possibilities: 1) that people from the smaller city come to the larger city (for employment, shopping, entertainment, education, etc) and 2) that representatives of the larger city may travel outwards to the smaller city, and bring with them the dialect features being diffused (e.g. in connection with the distribution of goods). In the case of SMG, the first explanation is the most likely. Spreading through music (like that of e.g. Latin Kings) is also a plausible explanation.

Differences

Despite the similarities perceived between Rinkeby Swedish and Rosengård Swedish by adolescents in Malmö, many are surprised to hear that the Malmö adolescents perceive the soccer player Zlatan Ibrahimovic as a speaker of Rosengård Swedish (and not simply a speaker of the Malmö dialect). How large is the difference between SMG and the regional dialect? How large is the difference between e.g. Rosengård Swedish and Scanian? Although Rosengård Swedish clearly contain a number of non-regional features, not all speakers of Rosengård Swedish use all of those features, and many features of Rosengård Swedish are not distinct from the regional dialect (e.g. the word accents). 'Swedish on Multilingual Ground' should, therefore, only be seen as an overarching term for a number of related but distinct varieties. SMG in Malmö appears to be 'Scanian on Multilingual Ground' (which incidentally is reflected in the *Advance Patrol* member's artist name Gonza Blatteskånska).

In the present paper, we have presented a number of segmental and prosodic features that are common for all SMG varieties, but also discussed a feature that distinguishes them from each other (the word accent realization). Future research will reveal more similarities and differences and, thereby, hopefully shed some light on the relationship between the different SMG varieties on the one hand (e.g. if city-hopping has occurred), and on the relationship between SMG and foreign accent on the other.

Acknowledgements

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