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Pronunciation difficulties in L2 and the multilingual classroom

Mechtild Tronnier & Elisabeth Zetterholm

Introduction and background

This contribution presents a project, which aims to provide pedagogical assistance concerning pronunciation matters to teachers in Swedish as a foreign language. Swedish as a foreign language in Sweden is taught in classrooms, where students with diverse L1s can be found. This is the case for classes for exchange students at the universities as well as for classes containing students with other migration situations.

Adopting the transfer approach in second language learning, we base our study on the idea that students carry over pronunciation features from their L1 to the second language they learn. As it is generally known, L2-speakers' first language can easily be pointed out because of typical pronunciation features. The degree to which these remaining L1-features affect intelligibility in L2-communication varies between the individual speakers, but also between the different L1s. However, even if speech with foreign accent is intelligible, the strong presence of certain types of foreign accents has a social effect and can slow down integration into society. Helping the learners, using directed pronunciation training, is hopefully leading to better success in the integration process. For that reason, teachers in Swedish as a foreign language have to be familiarized with the typical foreign accent features of their students' L1s. Because the project presented here aims to produce a teaching aid for teachers in L2-Swedish, certain steps to achieve this goal have to be taken: 1. Analysis of the most frequent L1s in the L2-Swedish classrooms, 2. observed intelligibility of the L1-based pronunciation of L2, 3. Recordings of L2-speech by speakers with various L1s, 4. Phonetic analysis of foreign accents found in the recorded material.

Group of speakers in focus

Active teachers in Swedish as a foreign language have been contacted and they were asked to fill in an inquiry about the students in their classrooms. This inquiry contained questions about which L1s were most frequent – including a ranking –; which L1s lead to serious problems in communication; and if students were multilingual.

The most frequent eleven languages in the classroom were in decreasing order the following: Arabic, Somali, Bosnian/Kroatian/Serbian, Albanian, Chinese, Turkish, Kurdish, Vietnamese, Russian, Persian (Farsi)/Dari/Pashto and Thai. Making recordings of L1-speakers of these languages (except Russian) has been initiated. Mainly adult students with an approved proficiency in Swedish as a foreign language, studying at a special high school, have been recorded for that purpose. The recorded students were recommended by their teachers as representatives with a typical foreign accent related to their L1.

Material, data and metadata

Two L2-students per L1 were recorded reading a text and a story containing all Swedish segmental phonemes and prosodic peculiarities, including minimal pairs (stress placement, quantity, tonal word accents). They were also required to describe a picture story. In addition, metadata about each individual was collected: age, length of stay in Sweden, time span of studies of the Swedish language, other L1s, other L2s, and profession. So far, L2-Swedish speech produced by speakers of seven different L1s has been recorded.

A part of the data will be made accessible for teachers as online material for a course book. We are considering making the data available for research purposes through the CLARIN research infrastructure, including IMDI metadata descriptions.

Analysis

Deviating pronunciation that was observed in the recorded material was transcribed with IPA for each speaker through meticulous listening, using PRAAT. Typical pronunciation problems in Swedish L2 for the speakers of each L1 were compiled. Hereby, similarities in deviating pronunciation for the two speakers of the same L1 were considered as an indication for a typical occurrence of transfer.

Example: one word – different accents/pronunciations

word	Swedish	Somali L1	Albanian L1	Vietnamese L1
saluhall	[ˈsa:lø,hal:]	[ˈsa:lø,hal]	[ˌsaluˈha:l]	[ˌsaløˈhõ:n]
guldpapper	[ˈgøld,pap:əɪ]	[ˈgøldə,bap̩ɐr]	[ˌgulɔ̞ˈhʰapər]	[ˈwu:d,papɛ]
flygplatsen	[ˈfly:ɡ,platsən]	[ˈfəly:,b̩la:ɖsɛn]	[ˈflyɡˈpla:tsən]	[ˈfly:,plasən]

Results thus far

The analysis and description of the pronunciation of L2-Swedish is nearly completed for the recorded material of the L1-speakers of Somali, Albanian and Vietnamese. The foreign accent analysis of other languages from the collected data is ongoing. Examples of typical foreign accent features in L2-Swedish for speakers with

- **L1-Somali** (similarly to L2-English): 1. VOT for voiceless stops too short (lack of aspiration), 2. Unclear variation of length (quantity), 3. Vowel epenthesis in consonant clusters.
- **L1-Albanian**: 1. Stress placement, compounds, 2. Unclear variation of vowel length (quantity), 3. VC_[+nasal] results in a nasal vowel, (*Man kan* [man kan] → [mã kã])
- **L1-Vietnamese**: 1. vowel nasalization in open syllables, 2. Replacement of final nasal- and non-nasal consonants, 3. // → [n]

The project has also generated research byproducts, including studies and publications on Swedish word accent production by L2-learners with tonal and non-tonal L1.