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# Phonology of a southern Swedish idiolect

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In this egocentric article I describe briefly the segmental phonology of my own southern Swedish idiolect. I grew up in Getinge in central Halland, about 20 km north of Halmstad, speaking a regional variant of southern Standard Swedish. Although my dialect has certainly changed somewhat after I moved to Lund in 1964 at the age of 20, I believe that I still retain the basic pronunciation of vowels and consonants from my original dialect. There is one older description of the Getinge dialect by Colliander 1868. At that time, the dialect differed much more from Standard Swedish, and the main remaining segmental differences are the effects of *r* on surrounding segments, which are not treated by Colliander.

## The fate of *r*

As is well known, a conspicuous feature of southern Swedish dialects is the realization of the /r/ phoneme as a uvular fricative (or trill) [ʁ], whereas Standard (Central) Swedish has an apical trill or fricative. The ‘*r*-border’ between the two dialect areas goes about 25 km to the north of Getinge. In the northern part of the uvular *r* area, ‘vocalization’ of *r* is common, so that an *r* in a syllable coda becomes a glide or disappears completely, often influencing the quality of the preceding vowel. The standard reference for this is Sjöstedt 1936, who, curiously enough, does not include central and southern Halland in the ‘*r* vocalization area’, although *r* vocalization is regarded by the speakers as a characteristic feature of this dialect, distinguishing it from the Skåne dialects further to the south. In his 1913/18 monograph on the dialects of southern Halland, Ernst Wigforss’ consistently writes uvular *r* even in typical vocalizing positions. Wigforss, who was a native of Halmstad, may unconsciously have reconstructed an underlying *r* even when it had disappeared or become a glide. It seems unlikely that *r* vocalization had not taken place 100 years ago when Wigforss collected his data; I know by personal experience that it is found in the speech of people born around 1910.

The reflexes of etymological *r* (as indicated in the Swedish orthography) and their influence on surrounding segments is the main point in the segmental phonology where my idiolect differs from Standard Swedish:

(1) In syllable onsets, the reflex of *r* is [ʁ]: [ʁe:n] *ren* ‘clean’, Standard Swedish [re:n]; [gʁe:n] *gren* ‘branch’, Sw [gre:n]; [œ:ʁa] *öra* ‘ear’, Sw [œ:ra]; [hin.dʁa] *hindra* ‘hinder’, Sw [hin.dra].

(2) An etymological *r* which forms a syllable coda is retained as [ʁ] after short vowels, but is deleted after long vowels: [baʁ] *barr* ‘needle’, Sw [bar]; [moʁ.ʁa] *morra* ‘growl’, Sw [mor.ra]; [bœ:] *bar* ‘bare’, Sw [ba:r]; [sta:ka] *starka* ‘strong’, Sw [star.ka].

(3) An etymological *r* which is a part of a syllable coda is deleted: [ba:k] *bark* ‘bark’ (Sw [bark]); [ha:m.li] *harmlig* ‘annoying’ (Sw [harm.lig]).

(4) The quality of a vowel which precedes a deleted *r* is changed; see *Vowels* below.

(5) A dental consonant that follows a deleted *r* becomes alveolar; see *Alveolars* below.

**Table 1.** Duration and formant frequencies (means of three readings)

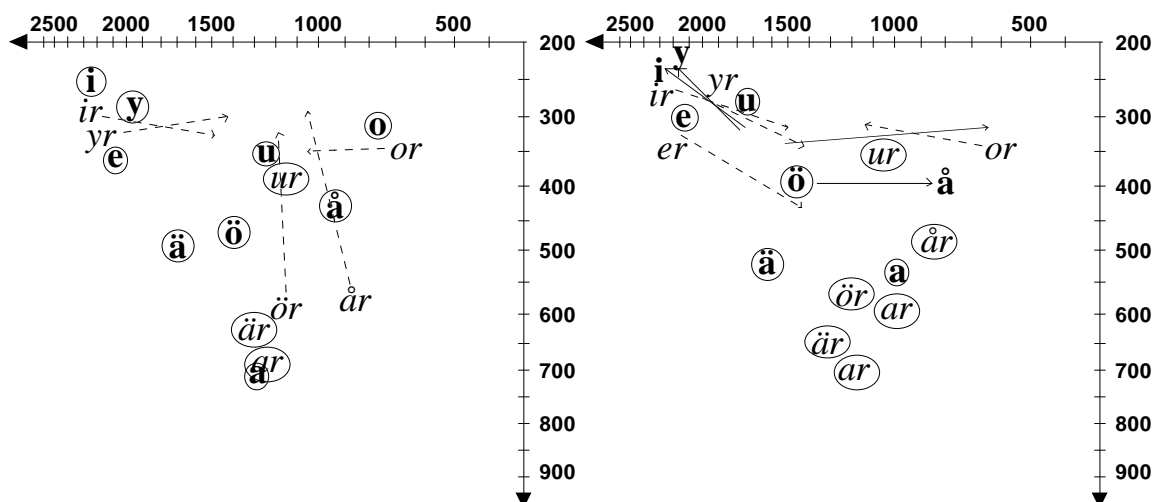
				dur	F1	F2					dur	F1	F2
i	[his]	hiss	'lift'	157	256	2212	ir	[hiəs]	hirs	'millet'	159	303	2170
e	[vet]	vett	'sense'	125	358	2074					328	1482	
ä	[væt]	vätt	'wet'	123	494	1693	är	[væt]	värt	'worth'	158	629	1319
a	[kat]	katt	'cat'	134	707	1303	ar	[kat]	kart	'unripe fruit'	143	684	1277
y	[systə]	syster	'sister'	106	293	1951	yr	[syəsə]	syrsa	'cricket'	124	313	2015
ö	[lø]	löss	'lice'	145	463	1396					304	1438	
u	[sköt]	skutt	'leap'	108	345	1242	ör	[bœəs]	börs	'purse'	165	567	1152
o	[skut]	skott	'shoed'	106	305	786	ur	[köt]	Kurt	(name)	121	386	1159
å	[skot]	skott	'shot'	95	423	926	or	[kuət]	kort	'card'	117	338	723
											331	1059	
							år	[kɔət]	kort	'short'	115	550	850
											289	1083	
i	[bi:s]	bis	'bee's'	250	320	1787	ir	[pi:əs]	pirs	'pier's'	291	263	2190
e	[e:s]	es	'e's'	301	315	2145					311	1503	
ä	[læ:s]	läs	'read'	296	514	1661	er	[e:əs]	ers	'your'	290	323	2151
a	[la:s]	las	'was laid'	288	525	1020					431	1447	
y	[hy:s]	hys	'skin's'	265	315	1790	är	[læ:s]	lärs	'is learned'	286	649	1358
ö	[hø:s]	hös	'hay's'	279	387	1492	ar	[læ:s]	Lars	(name)	290	608	1040
u	[bø:s]	bus	'mischief'	270	286	1748	ar	[la:v]	larv	'grub'	327	698	1181
o	[kru:s]	kos	'cow's'	251	338	1538	yr	[hy:əs]	hyrs	'is hired'	255	275	2011
											334	1420	
							ör	[hœ:s]	hörs	'is heard'	288	565	1151
							ur	[bø:s]	burs	'cage's'	270	353	1087
							or	[ku:əs]	kors	'cows'	246	331	672
											311	1165	
							år	[lɔ:s]	lårs	'thigh's'	277	475	862
											390	836	

## Vowels

The vowels corresponding to the 18 Standard Swedish vowels (9 short and 9 long) are kept distinct. Furthermore, most of the vowels change their quality when they are followed by a deleted *r*. I will call these rhotacized vowels as opposed to plain vowels. I recorded a word list (presented in random order) illustrating all vowels in stressed syllables, and measured the two first formants and the duration of each vowel using the *Praat* analysis program created by Paul Boersma. I read each word in isolation five times, and the three middle recordings were analyzed. The results are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. For those vowels which were identified as diphthongs, two formant measurements were made, one at the beginning and one at the end of the vowel. The vowels are shown with orthographic symbols in Figure 1, and with IPA symbols as well in Table 1.

Most plain vowels are similar to the Standard Swedish ones. Long *i* and *y* are clearly diphthongic [iɪ: yɪ:], as are long *o* and *å* (Sw [u: o:]), which begin with an [ɪ/e]-like element: [ɪu: eo:]. Except for *a* [a a:] and *u* [ø u:] the short vowels are similar in quality to the long ones (or to the endpoint of long diphthongs). The duration difference is very clear, the long vowels being more than twice as long as the short ones (on the average 273 and 122 ms for plain vowels).

Many of the rhotacized vowels are descending diphthongs ending in an [ə]-like element, but some are more open versions of the plain vowel: [æ æ: ɐ/a: œ: ø: ɔ:] vs. [ɛ ɛ: ɑ: ø: ɞ: eo:]. Long plain *a* [a:] (as in [la:s] *las*) corresponds to two different rhotacized vowels, [ɐ:] if the following consonant is an alveolar ([læ:s] *Lars*), and [a:] otherwise ([la:v] *larv*). Short *a* [a] and *u* [ø] are not changed by *r*, and short *e* [e] does not occur in this context. The short rhotacized vowels consistently have somewhat longer duration than the plain ones (138 vs. 122 ms on the average). The mean duration of long rhotacized vowels is longer (282 ms) than for the plain ones (273 ms), but this difference is less consistent.



**Figure 1.** F1-F2 diagram for the short (left) and long (right) vowels.

### Alveolars

In most of the dialect area with apical *r*, combinations of *r* and a following dental [t d s n l] are realized as retroflexes [t̠ d̠ s̠ n̠ l̠], but in areas with uvular *r*, the dentals are unchanged. In my idiolect, the dentals are slightly backed after etymological *r*, but not nearly as much as in Standard Swedish. They can be regarded as alveolars [t̠ d̠ s̠ n̠ l̠], as opposed to the dentals [t d s n l]. I believe that alveolarization is a general feature of the dialects in this area, although it has, as far as I know, not been noted by the dialectologists (cf. Sjöstedt 1936:197). Examples are: [ka̠t̠] *kart* ‘unripe fruit’, Sw [ka:t]; [bu:ə̠d̠] *bord* ‘table’, Sw [bu:d]; [kə̠s̠] *kurs* ‘course’, Sw [kəs]; [bæ:̠n̠] *barn* ‘child’, Sw [bæ:n]; [çæ:̠l̠] *kärl* ‘vessel’, Sw [çæ:l]; [tœ̠s̠.t̠ i] *törstig* ‘thirsty’, Sw [tœs.tig]; more examples are given in Table 1.

### Phonemes

Since the etymological *r* was deleted in codas, and changed the preceding vowel, the long rhotacized vowels became phonemes:

[li:ka]	<i>lika</i>	‘like’	[tɑ:m]	<i>tam</i>	‘tame’	[bæ:k]	<i>buk</i>	‘belly’
[li:əka]	<i>lirka</i>	‘coax’	[tɑ:m]	<i>tarm</i>	‘guts’	[bø:k]	<i>burk</i>	‘can’
[se:]	<i>se</i>	‘see’	[dʏy:k]	<i>dyk</i>	‘dive’	[biu:]	<i>bo</i>	‘live’
[se:ə]	<i>ser</i>	‘sees’	[dy:ək]	<i>dyrk</i>	‘picklock’	[bu:ə]	<i>bor</i>	‘lives’
[lɛ:ka]	<i>läka</i>	‘heal’	[dø:]	<i>dö</i>	‘die’	[kø:k]	<i>kåk</i>	‘house’
[læ:ka]	<i>lärka</i>	‘lark’	[dœ:]	<i>dör</i>	‘dies’	[kɔ:k]	<i>kork</i>	‘cork’

The short rhotacized vowels occur only before the alveolars [t̠ s̠]. The corresponding short plain vowels do not occur before alveolars, but before dentals (and in other positions):

[his]	<i>hiss</i>	‘lift’	[sys.tə]	<i>syster</i>	‘sister’	[skut]	<i>skott</i>	‘shoed’
[hiəs]	<i>hirs</i>	‘millet’	[syə.sə]	<i>syrsa</i>	‘cricket’	[kuət̠]	<i>kort</i>	‘card’
[vɛt]	<i>vätt</i>	‘wet’	[møt]	<i>mött</i>	‘met’	[spot]	<i>spott</i>	‘spittle’
[væ̠t̠]	<i>värt</i>	‘worth’	[mœ̠t̠]	<i>mört</i>	‘roach’	[spœ̠t̠]	<i>sport</i>	‘sport’

Since the vowels [a ə] do not change by rhotacization, they can occur both before dental and alveolar consonants:

[kat]	<i>katt</i>	‘cat’	[kask]	<i>kask</i>	‘helmet’
[kaɾ]	<i>kart</i>	‘unripe fruit’	[kaʂk]	<i>karsk</i>	‘plucky’

For this reason, [t̥ s̥] must be regarded as phonemes distinct from [t s]. This implies that the short rhotacized vowels [iə æ yə œə uə əə], which occur only before [t̥ s̥], stand in complementary distribution with plain [i ɛ y ø u o], and can be regarded as allophones of them.

The rhotacized long vowel [œ:] normally occurs only before deleted etymological *r*. As was noted by Colliander 1868:15 and Wigforss 1913/18:181ff. as well, this vowel is found in some words in non-rhotacizing environments, in my idiolect including [hœ:na] *höna* ‘hen’; [grœ:n] *grön* ‘green’; [lœ:n] *lön* ‘salary’; [grœ:t] *gröt* ‘porridge’; [rœ:v] *röv* ‘arse’. Other words in similar environments have [ø:]: [bø:na] *böna* ‘bean’; [ʁø:] *röd* ‘red’. The minimal pair [hœ:na] *höna* ‘hen’ vs. [hœ:n̥a] *hörna* ‘corner’ shows that there is a (marginal) contrast between dental [n] and alveolar [n̥]. Alveolar [d̥ l̥] do not seem to contrast with plain [d l] and can be regarded as allophones of them occurring after rhotacized vowels.

There are two rhotacized vowels [ɐ: a:] corresponding to plain long [ɑ:]. The vowel [ɐ:] occurs only before alveolars, before [ʁ] (in the next syllable) and word-finally: [bɐ:n̥] *barn* ‘child’; [kɐ:t̥ a] *karta* ‘map’; [bɐ:ʁa] *bara* ‘only’; [skɐ:] *skar* ‘cut’. The vowel [a:] does not usually occur before dentals or alveolars or word-finally, but only before other consonants: [ha:v] *harv* ‘harrow’; [ska:pa] *skarpa* ‘sharp’. There are a few exceptions including [ska:] *ska* ‘shall’; [ga:lən] *galen* ‘crazy’; [fa:ən] *fan* ‘damn!’. It contrasts regularly with [ɑ:] (e.g. in [ska:pa] *skapa* ‘create’), and marginally with [ɐ:] ([skɐ:] *skar* ‘cut’). The contrast between [ɑ:] and [ɐ:] can be illustrated with [hɑ:] *ha* ‘to have’ vs. [hɐ:] *har* ‘has’.

This leads to the following phoneme system. Those consonants which have not been mentioned above are more or less identical to those in Standard Swedish.

i:	y:	ɯ:	ɯ:	i:ə	y:ə	u:ə	i	y	u	p	t	t̥	k		
e:	ø:	ø:	eo:	e:ə			e	ø	o	b	d		g		
ɛ:	œ:		ɔ:				ɛ			f	s	s̥	ç	ʃ	
æ:										v			j	ʁ	h
a:	ɶ:	ɑ:					a			m	n	n̥	ŋ		
											l				

## Conclusion

My idiolect, and most probably the dialect on which it is based, combines the southern Swedish feature of having uvular *r* with some Central Swedish features such as the occurrence of post-dental (in this case alveolar) consonants and the rule that only long vowels combine with a following voiced post-dental (Aurén 1874:68).

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