

Urban adolescents in interaction in their L1 and L2: production, perception and the evaluation of a data collection method

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Abstract

The thesis described herein combines quantitative sociophonetic segmental analysis with study on second language use (namely English in Sweden), work on pragmatics and listener judgements, applied educational linguistics and analysis of the informant experience. The main data collection comprises recordings of 111 adolescents in Stockholm and Gothenburg; survey results from 80 teachers of English as a second language in Sweden and Germany; and results of two perception studies of 180+202 respondents. Two of the four studies focus on segmental variables among some adolescent speakers in Gothenburg, one on a possible incipient merger of /i/ and /y/, and the other on the production of plosives in the L1 (Swedish) and L2 (English). Overall, the main contributions of this thesis will consist of sociophonetic descriptions of Gothenburg Swedish and English, a widening of the knowledge of English as a school subject and its teaching standards and ideologies, as well as a deeper understanding of the informant experience of partaking in data collection for linguistic research.

Index Terms: sociophonetics, urban speech, adolescent speech, Swedish, Gothenburg Swedish, map-task, educational linguistics, EFL, ESL, bilingualism, multilingualism

1. Motivation and aims

The overall motivation of this thesis is threefold:

- Taking steps to investigate the English of Sweden through a survey of teacher reflections (in a post-Brexit context) (**study 1**)
- Investigating one aspect of Swedish English (or, L1 Swedish vs. L2 English) by looking at the production and perception of plosives uttered by adolescents in interaction (**study 2**)
- Further investigation of adolescent speech in an urban Swedish context: /i/ and /y/ in Gothenburg Swedish, production and perception of a possible incipient merger. (**study 3**)
- Investigating the method used to gather interactional data: evaluating the data collection through audience design analysis and informant reflections (**study 4**)

The original and main aim of this thesis is, or was, to investigate some segmental variables of urban adolescent speech, through a number of production and perception studies of their L1 and L2s. In order to do so in a meaningful way, it seemed logical to also look at the role of English as an L2 among adolescents in Sweden. With the timing of the Brexit referendum in the UK, an opportunity arose to conduct a survey among English teachers in Sweden and Germany

(together with colleagues Dr. Susanne Mohr at the University of Bonn, and Dr. Sandra Jansen at the University of Paderborn). This study will be referred to as **Study 1**.

Study 2 concerns the production of intervocalic plosives by adolescents, and further attempts to combine a number of aspects relating to the interactional context:

- Which allophone of /k/ is produced?
- Do the Swedish adolescents produce /k/ differently when speaking Swedish and English?
- Do they produce /k/ differently depending on the pragmatic content of the utterance (here: <ok>)?
- What is the relationship between production and perception?
 - Is the perception of the pragmatic content connected to the production of /k/?
 - Can listeners correctly identify which language the utterance is from?

Study 3 (together with Johan Gross, fellow PhD candidate at the University of Gothenburg) is a description of a possible incipient merger of /i/ and /y/ taking place in some Gothenburg speakers.

Study 4 (again, together with Johan Gross) looks at the map-task as a tool for collecting interactional sociophonetic data, from two angles: from the point of view of the researcher, looking at how we can understand the map-task as a type of task/conversation/speech, using audience design [1] and aspects of speech event analysis [2]; and from the point of view of the informant, asking them to reflect on the experience in a follow-up telephone interview.

2. Methodology

Different methods are used in the different studies. Audio recordings were made by the author together with Johan Gross, in what we have called the Language Use in Stockholm and Gothenburg (SSG) project. 111 adolescents between the ages of 16-20 were recorded, in 4 schools: one in the city centre of each city, and one in a suburb to each city. A short background interview (based on the sociolinguistic interview) was recorded with each speaker, partly in order to gain social and language information, and partly in order to allow informants to familiarize themselves with the researchers and the recording situation/microphone setup. Interviews were approximately 15-40 minutes in length. In addition, informants completed a set of map-tasks in self-selected peer pairs: two were completed in Swedish and one in English. For the Swedish data, the target words depicted in the maps

contained different long vowels, and for the English map the target words contained plosives.

Study 1 is based on a web survey conducted during spring 2017, which was completed by 80 teachers of English as a foreign language; 46 in Sweden and 34 in Germany. The survey was built and administered in Question Pro (www.questionpro.com). It was distributed through social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), as well as through e-mail to contacts working in schools and with teachers. After the survey was closed, the information was downloaded and those respondents who had not completed the survey, or who did not meet relevant background criteria (e.g. those who did not work in either of the two countries) were removed.

Study 2 used the English and Swedish map-task data recorded as part of the SSG project, specifically the productions of <ok>. A perception test was performed online, with 180 participants, looking at whether participants could identify which meaning the utterance conveys, and in which language it was uttered. The production section of the study is under way, combining impressionistic transcription with acoustic analysis (in Praat) of the plosives in particular. Productions will be compared statistically using the background variables set out in section 1.

Study 3 used the Swedish map-task data from the SSG material. A whole-spectrum analysis was performed using R [3][4], capturing the PC1 and PC2 values of the target vowels /i/ and /y/. Background variables of the speakers included which area of the city they live in, their socioeconomic status. An online perception study was also performed here, asking 202 participants to identify the vowels (in isolation or within a full-word context).

Study 4 looks at the map-task data from an audience design point of view. This analysis was made through listening through the map-task materials, taking notes and transcribing relevant passages. This study also considers the point of view of the informants from the original recordings, using follow-up telephone interviews where informants were asked to reflect on the map-task recordings (in particular, but to some extent also the background interviews) through questions regarding how formal they perceived the two recording sessions to be.

3. Results so far

Preliminary analysis of the **Study 1** data shows that teachers of English in Sweden mostly focus on teaching a fluent English with communication as the main function, rather than a specific (regional) variety of English. This is in line with English curricula in Swedish national schools. Teachers in Sweden do not report concerns relating to Brexit or other political events in the English-speaking world: they do not anticipate that this will have an impact on their teaching (beyond discussing the events with pupils, where appropriate). Analysis of the results pertaining to pronunciation teaching is yet to be undertaken.

Study 2 is yet to be completed.

Study 3 gives indications, based on acoustic analysis and the perception test, that there is indeed a possible incipient vowel merger. This merger would follow a merger-by-approximation model [5], and is supported by the perceptual similarities between the centralized [i] and /y/ as well as the

limited perceptual strength of some articulatory features in the disappearing phoneme /y/.

Study 4 shows that more tokens (target words) are produced in the sections of the interaction where informants work together to establish, update and maintain common ground. In the context of a map-task, these situations are triggered by making the two maps slightly different, replacing one image with another. This also contributes to a more balanced distribution of turns and speaker time. Framing the task as a game seems to also trigger the balanced interaction. Results also show that while roles are nominated to informants by the researchers, these roles are negotiated and altered as the speech event continues: informants are given control of the situation and can negotiate their own set of rules within the task, as well as up- or downgrade the role of the researcher. This relates to audience design. Furthermore, in the telephone interviews informants reflect on their own language use and the purpose of the recording sessions, showing a high degree of awareness of audience design/accommodation.

4. Main contributions

One strength of this thesis is that it combines several different types of theory and methodology, borrowed from diverse fields such as sociophonetics, psycholinguistics, online data collection methodology, conversational analysis, applied educational linguistics...

One of the main contributions of study 4 is that it allows the informant to reflect upon the experience of taking part in a research study, this allows us to get an insight into how the assumptions we as linguists make regarding things such as vernacularity and formality of speech/situation, and how these things translate into the minds of the informants. It also gives insights into the possibilities for the map-task (or another joint activity) to be a powerful tool to collect sociolinguistic data. Study 1 adds to the bank of knowledge on English in Sweden, both as a school subject and as a language in its own right. It contributes to research on teaching standards and ideologies, as well as standard language ideologies in the context of an L2. It also allows teachers to reflect upon their own practice, in a way that some of them report that they rarely have an opportunity to do.

Studies 1 and 2 combined also contribute to a description of Swedish English, and the varieties and productions that are represented. Study 2 is an initial attempt at describing the English used by urban Swedish adolescents. Studies 2 and 3 combined contribute to a sociolinguistic profile of language use in urban areas of Sweden. They both look at adolescent speech in Gothenburg, while 3 only concerns the L1 of the informants, 2 looks at the interaction between L1 and L2. Both combine analyses of production and perception.

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