Listening for “Rosengård Swedish”

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Abstract

In this paper, the first results from a perception experiment are presented and discussed. In the experiment, teachers and pupils were asked to listen for examples of so-called Rosengård Swedish in recordings from secondary schools in Malmö.

Introduction

The research project ‘Language and language use among young people in multilingual urban settings’ (Lindberg 2004) has as its goal to describe and analyze SMG. SMG stands for Swedish on Multilingual Ground, and refers to adolescents’ new, foreign-sounding ways of speaking Swedish.

SMG

These new ways of speaking Swedish are primarily found in suburbs and urban districts with a high proportion of immigrant residents, e.g. in Rosengård in Malmö. However, many of the speakers are born in Sweden, or have arrived in Sweden at an early age, and have acquired Swedish alongside with their mother tongue (at least since kindergarten). According to popular beliefs, some speakers of the so-called Rosengård Swedish do not even have an immigrant background. Therefore, the foreign-sounding features of their speech cannot necessarily be classified as transfer or interference from another language. It is furthermore often claimed that speakers of this foreign-sounding Swedish master a standard variety of Swedish too. These claims have lead to the hypothesis that the new foreign-sounding ways of speaking Swedish represent new Swedish varieties (dialects, sociolects or group languages) rather than individual speakers’ interlanguages (Kotsinas 1988).

Varieties like Rosengård Swedish are primarily a medium for social functions with other group members (Bijvoet forthc). The group identity is marked by signals of a non-Swedish background. Examples of non-Swedish linguistic features, that functions as such signals, are SV word order (where inverted word order is expected), and a pronunciation that is perceived as foreign-accented.

Purpose of the present study

In the perception experiment, Malmö teachers and pupils are asked to listen for examples of Rosengård Swedish in recordings from secondary schools. The purpose is to investigate their views of Rosengård Swedish.

Method

Stimuli

The stimuli have been extracted from the research project’s speech database. The database consists of different types of recordings (interviews, class-room recordings, etc) made at secondary schools in Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm. The Malmö recordings were made at three different schools: Cypresskolan, Dahlia-skolan and Ekskolan (code names). The individual speakers are described in more detail below, in the result section.

The stimuli are approximately 30 second long sections that have been extracted from spontaneous (unscripted) recordings in which the pupils interact with friends and class mates. A total of 27 stimuli have been prepared. In order to avoid that listeners hear stimuli recorded at their own school, and to delimit the duration of the experiment, each group of listeners only listen to a subset of the stimuli.

Some of the stimuli have been edited in order to exclude information that would otherwise reveal the speakers’ identities or the identities of others who are discussed in the recordings.

Listeners

Two listener groups

The listeners in the experiment are teachers and pupils. The results presented in this paper are the results of the first two groups of listeners who did the perception experiment: 10 teachers and 11 pupils at Cypresskolan. Several addi-
tional groups of listeners are planned to participate in the study.

**Listeners’ task**

The stimuli were played once to the listeners (over loudspeakers). The listeners were asked to answer two questions about each stimulus: Does the speaker speak what is generally called “Rosengård Swedish”? (yes or no), and How confident are you about that? (confident, rather confident, rather uncertain or uncertain). The listeners were asked to indicate their answers on an answer sheet. The listeners were also asked to answer a few questions about who they believed typically speaks Rosengård Swedish.

The pupils were asked to listen to a smaller set of stimuli than the teachers (18 stimuli), since an evaluation of the teachers’ test revealed that it had contained too many stimuli (24 stimuli).

**Results**

**Who did the listeners believe speak Rosengård Swedish?**

**Age**

According to the teachers in the listening test, mainly children and adolescents speak Rosengård Swedish. Out of the ten teachers, all believed that adolescents are potential speakers of Rosengård Swedish. Eight furthermore believed that some children speak Rosengård Swedish, and six teachers claimed that some adults speak Rosengård Swedish. Only one teacher was of the belief that Rosengård Swedish is spoken only by adolescents.

The pupils expressed similar opinions. Out of the eleven pupils, eight believed that some children speak Rosengård Swedish, and all eleven believed that adolescents are likely speakers of Rosengård Swedish. Four pupils believed that some adults speak Rosengård Swedish (the soccer player Zlatan Ibrahimovic was given as an example). Two pupils claimed that Rosengård Swedish is spoken only by adolescents.

**Background**

According to the teachers in the listening test, mainly speakers with an immigrant background speak Rosengård Swedish. Out of the ten teachers, all believed that second generation immigrants are potential Rosengård Swedish speakers. Nine teachers also believed that first generation immigrants are likely speakers of Rosengård Swedish. Only half of the teachers believed that speakers without an immigrant background can speak Rosengård Swedish.

Out of the nine pupils (two did not answer this question), none believed that Rosengård Swedish is spoken by persons born in Sweden by Swedish-born parents. Seven believed that some second generation immigrants speak Rosengård Swedish, and all nine believed that first generation immigrants are possible speakers of Rosengård Swedish.

**Which stimuli were perceived as examples of Rosengård Swedish?**

**Stimuli classified as Rosengård Swedish**

The teachers perceived quite few of our stimuli as examples of Rosengård Swedish. Only speakers E43, D49 and E04 were perceived as speakers of Rosengård Swedish by a majority (7 or 8) of the teachers. E43 arrived in Sweden at age 10 and her first language is Slovenian. D49 arrived in Sweden at age 4 and her first language is Albanian. E04 was born in Sweden by Swedish-born parents, and has Swedish as his first language.

Speakers E06, D31, E36 and D27 were classified as speakers of Rosengård Swedish by about half (4, 5 or 6) of the teachers. D31 and E36 are second generation immigrants, and E06 and D27 are first generation immigrants. They arrived in Sweden at the ages 7 and 9, respectively.

The pupils heard more examples of Rosengård Swedish in our stimuli than the teachers. A majority (8 to 11) of the pupils perceived E43, D49, E06, D31 and D27 as speakers of Rosengård Swedish. (Speaker E36 was not included in the pupils’ test). Speakers E04, D32 and E14 were perceived as Rosengård Swedish by about half (5, 6 or 7) of the pupils. D32 is born in Sweden but has a Russian-speaking mother, and E14 has Arabic as his first language.

**Stimuli not classified as Rosengård Swedish**

Most of the stimuli were classified as not being examples of Rosengård Swedish by the teachers. Speakers E04, E40, E31, E33, D07 and D02 are born in Sweden by Swedish-born par-
ents, and they were all classified as not speaking Rosengård Swedish. Speakers E19, E01, D32 and D09 are born in Sweden but have one parent who is born elsewhere. E14, E41 and E26 are second generation immigrants (both parents born elsewhere), and speakers E38, D40 and D47 are first generation immigrants (arrived in Sweden at the ages 6 or 7, 6 and 7, respectively). They were not perceived as speakers of Rosengård Swedish either.

The pupils classified speakers E40, D02, E01, D09, E14, E41, E26, E38 and D40 as not being speakers of Rosengård Swedish. (Speakers E31, E33, D07, E19 and D47 were not included in the pupils’ test.)

**Speaker E04**

Two speakers – E04 and E14 – appeared in more than one stimulus in the experiment. The listeners did not know that any speaker would appear twice, nor did they report having noticed reoccurring speakers.

One of the two stimuli produced by speaker E04 was perceived as not Rosengård Swedish by ten of the teachers. The listeners reported to feel confident (5 teachers) and rather confident (5 teachers) about their classification. The other stimulus, on the other hand, was perceived as Rosengård Swedish by a clear majority (8) of the teachers. The teachers again reported to feel fairly confident (confident 3, rather confident 4, rather uncertain 1). Out of the five teachers who did not believe that Rosengård Swedish is spoken among adolescents without an immigrant background, three classified E04’s stimulus as Rosengård Swedish. The pupils responded differently to the stimuli produced by E04. The five listeners without an immigrant background heard Rosengård Swedish in both stimuli (in 10 cases out of 10). The six pupils with an immigrant background were not equally convinced, however (2 out of 12).

**Speaker E14**

Another speaker who also appeared in two different stimuli was speaker E14 (arrived in Sweden before the age of 1). In one of the stimuli, he speaks to a friend, and in the other he speaks to a librarian at his school. The two stimuli were chosen as examples of two different types of settings: an informal vs a more formal setting.

Seven of the teachers judged E14 as not being a speaker of Rosengård Swedish whereas three classified his speech as being Rosengård Swedish. All the teachers were consistent in their classification of the speaker as Rosengård Swedish or not Rosengård Swedish, i.e. they responded in the same way to both stimuli.

Out of the eleven pupils, only one heard Rosengård Swedish in the library stimulus. Six pupils, nevertheless, heard Rosengård Swedish in E14’s conversation to a friend of his own age.

**Discussion**

Some of the preliminary test results presented in this paper are a little surprising to us. Although we purposely chose to include stimuli that we felt were clear examples of something else than Rosengård Swedish, we expected that the listeners would classify more stimuli as Rosengård Swedish than the teachers did. Comments from the teachers at Ekskolan (their test results are not reported here) indicate that the use of typical Rosengård Swedish words like *flipp* ‘joke’ and *flippa* ‘to joke, to have fun’ are important for a positive identification of Rosengård Swedish. The Cypress teachers’ responses to E04’s stimuli contradict that claim, however, since Rosengård Swedish words appear in both stimuli.

Another unexpected finding is that a foreign-sounding pronunciation was not sufficient for the listeners to classify a speaker as Rosengård Swedish. We did not expect that native listeners would regard foreign-accented *malmöitiska* (Malmö dialect) and Rosengård Swedish as distinct. It is, however, possible that the small number of stimuli perceived as Rosengård Swedish in the experiment, reflects that the listeners made such a distinction. Speaker D47, for example, has a foreign-sounding/foreign-accented pronunciation but was not perceived as a speaker of Rosengård Swedish. A discussion on how to distinguish between foreign accent, SMG and other types of youth language (if indeed possible) can be found in Hansson (forthc).

Finally, we had expected that speaker E14 would be perceived as Rosengård Swedish by more listeners in the informal setting than in the formal setting. Whereas the pupils’ responses showed such a trend, the teachers’ responses did not.

The continuation of the perception experiment (the analysis of a larger number of listeners’ responses) will allow us to follow up on these three initial findings.
Knowing more than one way to speak Swedish

The purpose of this study is not to investigate to what extent it is plausible to say that Rosengård Swedish is one of two or more varieties that adolescents master. Some evidence to support such a claim has, nevertheless, been found. Speaker E04 lends support to two claims about SMG: 1) that it can be spoken by adolescents without an immigrant background, and 2) that (at least some) speakers of SMG master more than one variety of Swedish.

Both the test results of the teachers and the pupils without an immigrant background support claim no. 1. Claim no. 2 is only clearly supported by the teachers’ test results, however.

A complicating factor to take into consideration in the interpretation of the pupils’ responses to E04’s stimuli, is the fact that some of them classified stimuli containing “false Rosengård Swedish” as not being Rosengård Swedish. In other words, if they believed that the speaker was not a “true speaker” of Rosengård Swedish, then they did not classify the stimulus as Rosengård Swedish. The pupils may very well have heard that E04 does not have an immigrant background (i.e. cannot be a true speaker of Rosengård Swedish). Remember that the pupils claimed that Rosengård Swedish is spoken only by people with an immigrant background.

Different views of Rosengård Swedish

The perception experiment was initially meant to do something that we felt was very difficult: to identify speakers of Rosengård Swedish in our recordings. Pupils and teachers in Malmö were asked to participate as listeners in the experiment, under the assumption that they are more familiar with Rosengård Swedish and Malmö youth language than we are. However, it has become evident that the views of Rosengård Swedish vary between our listeners (between teachers and pupils, between pupils with and pupils without an immigrant background, etc), and so we are faced with a new problem. Now we need to think about whose view of Rosengård Swedish to adopt.

Future work

Future work includes describing the phonetics and phonology of SMG. The results of the perception experiment are crucial for a successful identification of representative speakers of Rosengård Swedish.

The results are also important for other project-related studies (e.g. Gudrun Svensson’s thesis work) since they too are meant to describe SMG and, therefore, depend on our ability to distinguish between foreign accent, SMG and other types of youth language.

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