NEW FOREIGN ACCENTS IN SWEDISH

Mechtild Tronnier[a] *& Elisabeth Zetterholm*[b]

[a]Department of Language and Literature, Lund University, Sweden;
[b]School of Language and Literature, Linnæus University, Sweden
Mechtild.Tronnier@ling.lu.se; Elisabeth.Zetterholm@lnu.se

ABSTRACT

In this contribution a project is presented which aims to expand and update the course material for the education of future teachers in Swedish as a foreign language. Due to new patterns of global migration in the last decades, the existing material needs to be complemented, which entails further analysis and description.

As global migration affects Sweden in a similar way to many other countries, this contribution aims to trigger the discussion about how teaching of pronunciation for this group of student teachers is addressed elsewhere.

Keywords: foreign accent, second language teaching, pronunciation problem

1. INTRODUCTION

Both authors of this contribution are currently involved in teaching courses in phonetics, with emphasis on Swedish phonetics for future teachers of Swedish as a foreign language at different Swedish universities. This includes teaching about phonetic variation in Swedish which is not only based on dialectal diversity, but comprises even characteristics of foreign accents of those who do not have Swedish as their first language.

In the 1980s Bannert [1] and Garlén [4] succeeded in collecting and describing immigrant languages and compared them to Swedish, partly with the intention of pointing out the potential difficulties that are likely to occur for students of particular native languages. These lecture books contain descriptions of a varied number of languages–25 languages in [1] and 36 in [4]–where [4] merely presents the phonological systems of the different languages, and [1] also presents an analysis of observed pronunciation problems, based on a large amount of data collected from second language learners of Swedish. Bannert [1] also ranks the different languages according to their distance from the phonology of the Swedish language based on the number of observed pronunciation errors and difficulties produced by the native speakers of the diverse languages collected in the material. In this ranking, the phonological system of Dutch is closest to that of Swedish–which is not surprising as both languages are of the Indo-European/Germanic type–whereas Chinese, Hindi and Persian are ranked to be farthest away within the 25 language examples. Bannert also gives pedagogical advice on how to approach pronunciation difficulties. Besides the fact that this book [1] is out of print, the foreign accent analyses need to be expanded to include the growing group of first languages spoken by those learning Swedish as a second language; a natural consequence of new global migration patterns.

Bradlow, et al. [2] present a study concerned with perceptual distance between English and diverse L2. Dutch was perceived closest to English and Cantonese farthest from English. This corresponds to the results of Bannert's study on production of Swedish as L2. It can be seen from both studies that if L1 and L2 belong to the same language family, e.g. Germanic languages, the acquisition of L2 is facilitated.

Other studies of foreign accents have mainly focused on two specific contrasting languages [5] and/or specific pronunciation difficulties of particular phonological features [9] or both [5, 10]. Thorén [9] focuses on prosodic features of Swedish–mainly quantity aspects–and on how to approach them pedagogically when Swedish is taught as a second language, without specification of the learners' first languages. McAllister et al. [5] also are attracted by quantity aspects in Swedish and how they are produced and perceived by native speakers of English, Spanish and Estonian. However their work has more implications for the explanation of a foreign accent and does not include any pedagogical dimension. The latter is also true for Yamada & Tohkura [10], who explore the perceptual importance for Japanese learners of being able to distinguish /r/ from /l/ in English.

The first step towards the expansion and update of the teaching material requires an analysis of which languages are more common as native languages among the learners of Swedish

nowadays compared to the analyses introduced above ([1, 4]). The procedure to this update and the results will be presented below. Furthermore the intended procedure of the phonological and pronunciation analysis of the new native languages will also be discussed.

2. COLLECTION OF NEW LANGUAGES IN SWEDEN

Compiling a list of the most frequent native languages currently spoken by students on courses of Swedish as a foreign language is not an easy task. There are abundant statistics about different perspectives on this issue. National statistics [8] are available about the country of origin of immigrants in Sweden. This tells us something about the native languages, but does not give a clear picture about which type of students there are in the classroom. There is however information about how many students there are in the national program of Swedish for immigrants (SFI) [7], which gives every immigrant the opportunity to learn Swedish. Since there are also other students of Swedish in the country, who do not have the intention to immigrate for the time being, but still want to learn the local language–i.e. exchange students at various universities in the country–, the picture is not complete. Three different approaches have been undertaken to get a more complete image about which foreign languages are more frequent in Sweden, which could be representative for the L1 of the students in the classroom. In addition to that it will help to single out the native languages of the students who currently live in Sweden and those languages which are not covered in the analyses given in the lecture books for the teachers of Swedish as a second language.

2.1. National statistics

The Swedish national office of School and Education (Skolverket) [7] provides statistics about the native languages of the students who are enrolled in the SFI-program. The statistics are calculated for different groups of learners, according to their enrollment for adult classes or their status in being part of the obligatory school education, i.e. children and teenagers. Table 1 gives an overview of the ten most frequent L1 of the adult learners who were registered for the years 2005-2009. All available statistics have not been presented, as a comparison shows that there is a great amount of overlap between the L1s of the adult learners and the L1s of younger students.

Table 1: L1 of the adult students registered SFI for the years 2005-2009, in percentage [%] (taken from [7]).

Rank	Language	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
1	Arabic	23,9	24,8	22,9	18,1	17,2
2	Somali	6,8	5,7	5,6	5,2	4,1
3	Thai	6,0	6,0	5,9	6,2	6,9
4	Polish	5,4	5,7	5,6	4,5	4,0
5	Spanish	4,5	4,5	4,7	5,2	6,0
6	English	4,1	3,8	3,6	4,1	5,1
7	Kurdish/North Kurdish	3,6	3,9	4,5	4,7	4,7
8	Persian	3,1	2,9	3,3	3,6	3,7
9	Bosnian/Kroatian/Serbian	2,9	3,2	4,0	4,7	4,8
10	Turkish	2,9	2,9	3,0	3,3	3,8
	others	36,7	36,6	37,0	40,3	39,7

2.2. Most frequent languages in Sweden

In the series *Swedish National Atlas (Sveriges Nationalatlas)* Dahl compiled one volume about the languages in Sweden (*Språken i Sverige*) [3]. Here a table of the languages found in the country is presented, arranged by their frequency of occurrence. The ranking was derived from various factors: country of origin of the registered persons including knowledge about different languages occurring in some countries, parents of foreign origin, general immigration patterns, enrollment in SFI-courses etc. According to Dahl's analysis, 85% of the Swedish population has only Swedish as their L1. Among the remaining 15%, bilingual L1-speakers are included, and also those who have Swedish as one of their native languages.

Table 2: Most frequent languages in Sweden according to quota of speakers (taken from [3]). (Languages in *italics* are unlikely to occur as L1 in the classroom).

Rank	Language	%
1	*Swedish*	85,49
2	*Finnish*	2,5
3	Arabic	1,64
4	Bosnian/Kroatian/Serbian …	1,2
5	Spanish	0,7
6	*Norwegian*	0,68
7	*Danish*	0,62
8	Persian	0,58
9	Kurdish	0,51
10	Albanian	0,48
11	Aramaic	0,45
12	Vietnamese	0,38
13	Turkish	0,31
14	Kantonese	0,3
15	Hungarian	0,24
16	Somali	0,22

In Table 2 the 15 most frequent languages from [3] are presented. It is interesting to see that the

Sami language, one of Sweden's indigenous languages, can only be found on rank 35 and is therefore not present in the Table 2.

2.3. A supplementary enquiry

The authors of this contribution have undertaken an enquiry addressed to those currently engaged in teaching Swedish as a foreign language (scholarly year 2010-11). Besides a ranking of the encountered L1 of their students (preferably giving the number of students), other questions about target group of students (age, exchange students etc.), literacy, proficiency in other (European) languages and the teachers' subjective impression about which L1-speakers have most difficulty in acquiring Swedish, were included in the enquiry.

The ranking of the occurrence of the different L1s was assembled according to different components: a numbered list was provided where the encountered L1s could be ranked in the questionnaire, according to their apprehended frequency. However not all teachers filled in the figures so that measure could not count alone for the frequency of occurrence. Table 3 shows the ranking of L1s gathered from the authors' questionnaire filled in by the teachers. It was chosen to group together the languages Persian, Dari and Pashto, which belong to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European languages, as some teachers did not made the distinction in the questionnaire, coherent with not making a difference between different Arabic or Chinese variants.

Table 3: Most frequent languages acquired by the authors' enquiry.

Rank	Language
1	Arabic
2	Somali
3	Bosnian/Kroatian/Serbian
4	Albanian
5	Chinese
6	Turkish
7	Kurdish
7	Vietnamese
8	Russian
9	Persian/Dari/Pashto
10	Thai

2.4. Frequent and new L1 in Sweden

All three tables show that Arabic occurs most frequently. Somali has second rank in two of the analyses. There is considerable overlap in the lists, which includes many languages originating from countries and areas with recent war activities: The Balkans, Afghanistan and Irak. The relatively high occurrence of European languages as L1 (Spanish, English Polish) is not very surprising due to the proximity of the countries and the mobility within the European Union. It is however possible that L1-speakers of Spanish originate from Latin America. More surprising is the relatively high number of L1-speakers of south-east Asian languages: Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai.

Many of the frequently occurring L1s are already analyzed in the course books, but some are new and have to be described for future purposes. Somali is one of the languages which neither gets attention in [1] or [4] and has to be addressed in the renewed material. The phonological systems of Albanian, Kurdish and Vietnamese are presented in [4], however no foreign accent analysis is available for these languages. Even this will be included in the forthcoming course literature.

2.5. Observed pronunciation difficulties in Swedish

There is extensive agreement among teachers of Swedish as a foreign language that intelligibility of L2-Swedish is most difficult for the L1-speakers of the South East Asian languages, which mainly seems to be related to the lack of complex consonant clusters in these languages, which are common in Swedish. Introduction of vowels to overcome consonant clustering also disturbs the language rhythm and perturbs the prosodic continuity.

3. FURTHER ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Several steps have to be taken for the compilation of updated course material. This includes generation and revision of phonological descriptions and the making and analysis of recordings of Swedish speech of speakers with different L2s.

The phonological system of the language which has not been present in the previous course literature, Somali, has to be researched and arranged in a way that is easy to follow by the students, future teachers of Swedish as a second language, and those who have no deeper knowledge in phonological theory. A contrastive approach to the presentation of the phonological system of Somali is the possibility, already at this stage, to make these future teachers aware of potential difficulties which students of Swedish

with a particular L1 are likely to encounter. Furthermore, the existing phonological descriptions have to be revised to current literature. Similar to the presentation of the phonological system of Somali, a presentation of the phonology with a contrastive approach to the Swedish phonology is proposed. Garlén [4] presents the phonological systems of 36 languages, but no analytical approach to foreign accent in Swedish has been undertaken. This is however the case for [1], which does not contain the description and analysis of equally many languages.

The analysis of foreign accent features in Swedish due to the L1 of the speaker will be based on recordings of the L2-Swedish learners. These recordings will contain read words and phrases and spontaneous speech, like the description of a picture. One extra idea is to let the L2-Swedish learners try to imitate correct Swedish speech. These imitations will also be recorded and taken into account for foreign accent analysis, concentrating mainly on respect to prosodic features.

With the help of speech analysis tools such as *PRAAT* [6], auditory analysis of segmental and prosodic foreign accent features for speakers of all recorded L2s will be pursued.

The method of making the foreign accent features clear in the text of the course material–whether in a graphic design similar to what is found in [1] or in text–is not yet decided. It is however decided that many sound examples will be included in the course material, demonstrating the individual foreign accent features based on the speakers L1. These sound examples will be taken from the recordings made for feature analysis.

4. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

It is clear that new course material is needed for students of "Teaching Swedish as a Foreign Language". It has been shown that a new language, Somali, has come to Sweden and that other languages, which have been in Sweden before have become more frequent. The phonological systems of these languages and the typical foreign accent features need therefore to be made clearer, including more listening examples for future teachers of Swedish. In order to assist teachers with their tuition of L2-learners of Swedish any future material will need to be more extensive than the current material.

5. REFERENCES

[1] Bannert, R. 2004. *På väg mot Svensk Uttal.* Studentlitteratur, Lund, Sweden.

[2] Bradlow, A., Clopper, C., Smiljanic, R., Walter, M.A. 2010. A Perceptual phonetic similarity space for languages: Evidence from five native language listener groups. *Speech Communication* 52, 930-942.

[3] Dahl, Ö. 2010. *Språken i Sverige.* Sveriges Nationalatlas, Norstedts Förlagsgrupp AB, Stockholm, Sweden.

[4] Garlén, C. 1988. *Svenskans fonologi.* Studentlitteratur, Lund, Sweden.

[5] McAllister, R., Flege, J., Piske, T. 1999. The acquisition of Swedish long vs. short vowel contrast by native speakers of English, Estonian and Spanish. *Proc. 14th ICPhS* San Francisco, 751-754.

[6] PRAAT. *http://www.praat.org*

[7] Skolverket (Swedish national office of School and Education). *http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/1745/a/20537* (requisition 6.3.2011)

[8] Statistiska Centralbyrån. *http://www.scb.se*

[9] Thorén, B. 2008. *The Priority of Temporal Aspects in L2-Swedish Prosody.* Doctoral thesis, Stockholm University, Sweden.

[10] Yamada, R.A., Tohkura, Y. 1992. Perception of American English /r/ and /l/ by native speakers of Japanese. In Tohkura, Y., et al. (eds.), *Speech Perception Production and Linguistic Structure.* Tokyo, Japan: OHM Publishing, 155-174.