Abstract

This paper gives a brief overview of the history of the Swedish settlements in Estonia. The dialectal areas and some characteristics of Estonian Swedish will be outlined.

The first records of Swedish settlers in Estonia date back to the end of the 13th century. The main areas of Swedish settlement were on the islands and on the west coast of Estonia. According to the census of 1934 the number of Swedes in Estonia was 7641; by 1970 this number had been reduced to 435.

The Estonian Swedish dialects belong to the eastern dialects of Swedish. The following sub-dialects can be distinguished: Ruhnu (Runö), Vormsi-Noarootsi-Riguldi (Ormsö-Nuckö-Rickull), Pakri-Vihterpalu (Rågö-Vippal). As there are only a handful of speakers of Estonian Swedish left in Estonia, and a couple of hundreds in Sweden, old recordings form a valuable asset for the phonetic study of this dialect. At the end of the paper some information about the recorded materials available in different archives will be presented.