The Pronunciation of Somali-Accented Swedish
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Abstract

The numbers of Somali immigrants in Sweden has increased during the last years and there is a need of more competence for teaching Swedish as a second language to this group. Star This paper investigates aspects of difficulties in the pronunciation of Swedish for Somali speakers. Recordings of two Somali speakers living in Sweden have been analyzed and it is obvious that there are pronunciation differences between Somali-accented Swedish and standard Swedish depending on the phonology in the two languages.

Introduction

Due to the situation in the Horn of Africa the population with Somali as their mother tongue has increased in Sweden. During the last 10 years a lot of Somali immigrants has arrived to Sweden and in 2010 they were about 30.000 (www.migrationsverket.se). According to Migrationsverket, more Somali immigrants are expected in 2012 because of earlier migrated relatives. In a second language perspective, teachers with competence for teaching Swedish to this group of immigrants with the goal to bring them into society is necessary. To better understand the specific difficulties for Somali speakers when learning Swedish we need to know more about the Somali language and the differences between the two languages. An analysis of the general and more specific problems based on speech data is therefore needed. The focus of this paper is to explain some phonological and pronunciation differences between Somali-accented Swedish and standard Swedish.

Previous studies

According to Koffi (2010) there are more Somalis in south-central Minnesota, USA, than anywhere else in the world except in the Horn of Africa. Conway (2008) and Koffi (2010) have done some studies comparing the phonological systems of English and Somali in order to understand the pronunciation of Somali-accented English.

Studies in Somali-accented English

The voiceless stops cause problems to Somali speakers when occurring in English syllable codas, according to Koffi (2010). The phoneme /p/ is missing in many of the North and East African languages. The pronunciation of /p/ in the beginning of words often sounds more like the voiced stop /b/. Conway (2008) did a Voice Onset Time analysis and found out that the speakers voiced /p/, especially in a word-initial position. Koffi (2010) focused on the coda cluster simplification by epenthesis or deletion. In order to avoid weighty codas the speakers add the vowel [i] in words like <walked> where the suffix is to be realized as [pt], [kt] ord [st]. When the coda is voiced, the speakers uses deletion instead, e.g. <begged> is pronounced [bɪɡ̊] instead of [bɛɡ̊d].

Somali language

Somali is an Afro-Asiatic language. Nowadays, Somalia is one the few countries in Africa where nearly 100% of the population speaks the same language. In 1972 Somali became a written language and since then is has been the official language of Somalia (Conway, 2008). Earlier, Arabic also was an official language due to Islamic influence, most part of the population are Muslims. There are also cultural ties to other countries on the Arabic peninsula. Nowadays, there are three languages in the Somali school system, namely Somali, Arabic and English. Even though Arabic has established itself as a second language in Somalia, most Somalis would prefer English because of international communications (http://www.iprt.org/role_of_somali_language_in_educa.htm).

There are three distinct dialects of Somali, the Northern dialect (used as the standard dialect), the Benadir dialect (spoken in Mogadishu and along the coast of the Indian Ocean) and the May dialect. The two first dialects are fairly inter-comprehensible but the May dialect is not...
comprehensible to the other two and is rarely used as a written language. The Northern dialect is used as a lingua franca (Saeed, 1999).

**The phonology of Somali**

Standard Somali has 22 consonant phonemes and 5 different vowels in each of the categories back and front. These 10 vowels are split between [+ATR] and [-ATR] (Advanced Tongue Root). The vowels can also occur as long and short variations (Saeed, 1999).

The five front vowels are [i, i, e, e, æ] and the five back vowels are [u, o, o, a, a]. Each of these ten vowels occurs in a long and a short variation. There are very little changes in vowel quality between the long and the short sounds. There is also a system of vowel harmony at the level of the phonological word (Saeed, 1999, Conway, 2008). In agreement with vowel harmony, there are also five front and back diphthongs, both long and short.

Compared to Swedish there are some differences in the phonological system. Somali has two nasals, /m/ and /n/. /m/ can only occur word initially or medially, never word finally (Conway, 2008). Swedish has three nasal phonemes. Besides the two mentioned there is also a [ŋ] (Garlén, 1988). The two languages share some stops, /t, k, b, d, g/, but there is no /p/ in Somali. Some other stops in Somali do not exist in Swedish, e.g. /ʔ, d, g/. The voiceless stops /t, k/ is often aspirated in Somali. There are three fricatives /χ, h, ʕ/ that do not occur in Swedish and one voiceless affricate /tʃ/. There are no voiced fricatives in Somali. /l/ is a retroflex, /r/ is an alveolar trill and a short r-sound often realizes as a tap. There is also a bilabial glide /w/ which do not exist as a phoneme in Swedish (Garlén, 1988, Koffi, 2010).

Since Somalia has been culturally and religiously tied to Arabic-speaking nations in the northern part of Africa the Arabic language have influenced the Somali language. The phoneme /ɣ/ exists only in words borrowed from Arabic (Saeed 1999).

The structure of the syllables is V, CV, VC and CVC. Consonant clusters are not allowed in the beginning or in the end of a word, but at a syllable boundary within a word. Root morphemes consist usually of one or two syllables.

In Somali there are three different tones, a high tone, a low tone and a falling tone. The word tones make grammatical distinctions, not lexical. The tone is on the mora, not the vowel. A long vowel or a diphthong has two moras and can have two different tones, resulting in a contour tone. Every mora has a high or a low tone. Every single word can only have one high tone at penultima or the last mora. A high-low tone is realized as a falling tone. Stress is connected with tone in Somali. The high tone as strong stress, the falling tone has less stress and the low tone has no stress (Saeed 1999).

**The pronunciation of written Somali**

There is a close connection between the spelling and the phonological system of Somali. This includes that both vowels and consonants with long quantity is written with two letters of the same type.

The voiceless /t/ and /k/ is realized as the voiced /d/ and /ɡ/ in a syllable final position. The voiced plosives are often realized as voiceless in the beginning and at the end of a word. The nasal letter <m> realizes as /n/ in a syllable final position. A glottal plosive will precede an initial vowel, both in word- and syllable-boundaries. The letter <u> is pronounced like an [u] (as in the Swedish word hosta). The letter <o> is pronounced like an [ɔ] (as in the Swedish word måste). (http://www.somaliska.info/p/lite-om-somaliskan.html). The long sounds, both vowels and consonants, are shown in the orthography with doubling the letter.

**The present study**

The analysis has focused on two Somali speakers living in the southern part of Sweden. One male and one female Somali speaker has been recorded reading some Swedish sentences. The choice of sentences focuses on contrasts such as vowel quantity and quality, consonants (such as approximants, fricatives and plosives with and without aspiration), consonant cluster and tonal word accents. In order to get some spontaneous speech the informants were asked to described two different pictures. Both speakers are from Somalia, they have lived in Sweden for about 6 years and studied Swedish in the program Swedish for immigrants (sfi) for 1,5-2 years. Apart from Somali, they both speak Arabic and English.

The aim of this study is to find some general differences between Somali-accented Swedish and standard Swedish but also focus on the pronunciation of the phoneme /p/, the
nasals, possible epenthesis in consonant clusters and the rounded vowels.

**The observed Somali-accented Swedish**

The first impression is the prosody and the lack of the Swedish intonation pattern. However, the speaker’s quite monotonous speech might depend on the situation when reading sentences. Some of the words might be new, although they are typical Swedish words. In the recording with spontaneous speech there are a lot of pauses without a longer part of connected speech. The speech reminds of a staccato-like pattern. The speakers also pronounce the words without reduction, with hyper-articulation of most segments.

**Consonants**

In Swedish words like sjön (the lake), skynda (hurry up) the speakers use a uvular fricative instead of a Swedish velar fricative. That might indicate that their speech is influenced by the Arabic pronunciation.

The voiceless stops /t, k/ are often correctly pronounced with aspiration in a word-initial position, e.g. in words like tid (time) and två (two). However, in a final position the voiceless /t/ is pronounced with a voiced /d/ in words like gult (yellow), söderut (go south) and havet (the ocean). There are no observations that voiced stops were realized as voiceless in a word-initial position.

The Swedish phoneme /p/ seems to cause some problems for the speakers. It is pronounced like the voiced /b/ in all positions, but particularly at the beginning of words. It is obvious in words like pappa (dad) [baba], pojke (boy) [bɔjka], äpple (apple) [æbbla].

Somali has two nasals [m] and [n], while Swedish also has [n]. There are no words ending with /m/ in the read sentences and therefore we do not know anything about the pronunciation in such words. The third phoneme [n] is realized as [n] + [ŋ] in all words and all positions by the Somali speakers. Example words taken from the read sentences are pengar (money), lingon (lingonberry), många (many) and lång (long).

The speakers tend to simplify consonant clusters by deleting of one consonant or, more often in these recordings, by inserting a vowel between the two consonants. A schwa is inserted between the two last consonants in words like utomlands (abroad), semester (the vacation), handla (buy) and between the two first consonants in words like klarar (solve) and flög (fly). The word fiesta (most of) is realized like [Falasata] in order to get close to the syllable structure of Somali.

The Swedish [ɛ] is pronounced more like the voiceless affricate [ʧ] in the beginning of words like kyrkan (church) and Kina (China). This can be explained due to the consonants in Somali or maybe the speakers’ knowledge of English. To get closer to the Swedish pronunciation the speaker could have used the palatal-alveolar [ʃ] instead.

**Vowels**

Sometimes the speakers have problems with the distinction between long and short vowels in Swedish, which is quite interesting since Somali also has this kind of distinction, although there are little changes between the two categories. In Swedish there is often no cue in the orthography, like in Somali.

An initial vowel or vowels within syllable-boundaries are often preceded by a glottal stop in Somali. In the read Swedish sentence Han bar henne i sina armar (he carried her in his arms) there are two syllable-boundaries with a vowel on either side. In the recordings especially the female speaker a glottalization is audible and visible in the spectrogram between [e] and [i] as well as between the two /a/-vowels. See Figure 1. There is no glottal stop found before an initial vowel, as might be expected.

![Figure 1. Waveform and spectrogram showing the glottalization. Female Somali speaker.](image-url)

Like many second language learners of Swedish the Somali speakers have problems with the fronted rounded vowels [u] and [y]. In words like turister (tourists), guld (gold) and ut (out) the /u/-vowel is replaced with a back rounded [u]-vowel.

The Swedish fronted rounded /y/-vowel is always pronounced like an /i/-vowel in words
like tycker (think), lyssna (listen) and lösrycka (disconnected).

Prosody
Both speakers have a very monotone speech in the recordings, both in reading and spontaneous speech. They have some difficulties with the word stress and the quantity of the vowels, but they both manage to pronounce the Swedish tonal word accents. There is a pattern among the speakers that all compounds and derivations always get the main stress on the first component or syllable regardless of the standard Swedish rules for affixation.

Discussion and conclusion
The results obtained from two speakers indicate that there are not so many differences concerning the pronunciation of Swedish if the speaker’s mother tongue is Somali compared to other second language learners of Swedish.

The inventory of the Somali phonological system show that Swedish and Somali share a great number of segments. However, Somali is missing the voiceless stop /p/, the voiced /v/ and a velar nasal. Some of the Somali fricatives do not exist in Swedish. The analysis confirm that there are some obvious differences in the realization of segments and the pronunciation of Somali-accented Swedish compared to standard Swedish concerning both consonants and vowels.

Like in Somali-accented English, the second language learners of Swedish have some difficulties with the pronunciation of the voiceless /p/, especially in a word-initial position and it is realized and perceived as a voiced /b/. The consonant clusters are also troublesome for the Somali speakers who often use epenthesys and deletions for simplification.

The pronunciation of nasals, [ŋ] + [ɡ], is quite common for second language learners of Swedish regardless of mother tongue. Since Somali has only two nasals it might be difficult to know how to pronounce /n/+/ɡ/ as one single velar nasal sound. According to Conway (2008) Somali-speaking English language learners simplify the /ng/ to a /n/-sound at the end of words.

The Swedish fronted rounded vowels always seem to be difficult for a second language learner. The Somali speakers are no exception.

Pedagogical strategies for teachers of Somali-speakers learning Swedish as a second language might be to focus on the pronunciation of the voiceless /p/, the Swedish nasals, consonant clusters and the fronted rounded vowels as well as the distinction between long and short vowels. Compared to studies of Somali-accented English (Conway, 2008, Koffi, 2010) it is obvious that Somali speakers have the same problems, concerning the voiceless /p/ and the consonant clusters, when learning English as L2. The speakers simplify the consonant clusters by deleting one or two consonants or insert a vowel between two consonants. This is the same pattern for the Somali L2 learners of Swedish and English. In Somali the phoneme /m/ does not occur word finally but we have no examples in Somali-accented Swedish, nor in any of the English studies.

References
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