Hæ?: Exploring factors influencing identification and judgements of Norwegian dialects.

Speakers typically vary in their use of phonetic and phonological variants as a function of their geographical location (English: Wells, 1982; Evans & Iverson, 2004; Dutch: Van Bezooijen & Gooskens, 1999; Norwegian: Gooskens, 2005). However, the contribution of acoustic cues to speaker identification and categorisation is contested for some languages, in particular Norwegian (Gooskens & Heeringa, 2006). The current study focuses on the role of phonetic variants in dialect identification and categorisation in 2 Norwegian dialects: Standard Eastern Norwegian (the dialect associated with the capital, Oslo, as its cultural centre) and Nord-Trøndersk (a regional dialect localised in the middle of Norway, north of Trondheim). These dialects differ primarily in their use of palatalised variants /ɟ, ɲ, ʎ/ which are present in Nord-Trøndersk but not in Standard Eastern Norwegian (realised as /d, n, l/ respectively). The phonetic difference is exploited in the present study.

Native Norwegian listeners (N=30), with varying familiarity to Standard Eastern Norwegian and Nord-Trøndersk, undertook two tasks. First, in an identification accuracy task, listeners were required to identify the dialect from single words produced by a female talker. The words presented in the identification accuracy task differed only in key phonetic variants. Second, in a sentence judgement task, listeners gave judgements on a continuous scale from Standard Eastern Norwegian to Nord-Trøndersk. Sentences were grouped into four conditions on a cline from fully Standard Norwegian to fully Nord-Trøndersk based on how much of the sentence contained Nord-Trøndersk variants.

Results from the identification accuracy task suggested that listeners were able to identify each dialect above chance, and that no measures of familiarity predicted identification accuracy. However, when listeners were compared at a group-level based on familiarity measures, listeners who currently lived in or who had grown up in a location where palatalisation is a dialect feature were better able to identify what was not their dialect, with better identification for the Standard Eastern Norwegian dialect. Overall, data from the sentence judgement task demonstrated that, as expected, all listeners judged speech samples with more regional variants as more ‘regional’. However, the presence of only a few regional phonetic variants facilitated large increases in regional judgements, suggesting that listeners are highly sensitive to the presence of regional phonetic variants in a speech sample, even when the rest of the speech sample was spoken in the standard dialect. Additionally, speech samples with a high quantity of words containing regional variants also resulted in higher ‘regional’ judgements by listeners. In conclusion, the present study highlights the sensitivity of listeners to regional phonetic variants, and strengthens the argument for their importance in dialect identification and categorisation.

References


