

Dialect change in West Sweden

2006-2011

The original aim of the project was to investigate linguistic change in West Sweden after 1950. Apart from some minor directional changes this has been fulfilled. In order to be able to answer questions like to what extent are traditional dialect features still used?; has new linguistic features appeared?; from where?; are they from Gothenburg?; who uses which linguistic variants?, we have focused the study concerned with the dialect situation in the area in the early 21st century. When analyzing the data it became clear that there is substantial variation in dialect use between, as well as within, different groups. To study the variation then became an aim in itself. The question how dialects have leveled since the mid 20th century has still been important, but it has been investigated in slightly different ways throughout the separate parts of the area. For instance, in Västergötland we describe both apparent and real time change whereas in Bohuslän we have investigated only apparent time change. We have provided an account of which traditional dialect features disappear and which are stable, thereby illustrating the leveling process.

Dialects do level towards standard, but many traditional dialect variants are still used by both adults and teenagers. Approximately 50 types of dialect variants have been noted in the speech of six informants recorded in Västergötland in the 1950s. Of these a little more than 40 variants can be found in the speech of the newly recorded 40 to 60 year-olds, and approximately half of these are found in the teenagers' speech. Mainly the use of phonological and prosodic variants is stable. Compared with the 1950s-informants it is only the more or less categorically used traditional variants that are still used to a larger extent by today's teenagers. Such variants are the cacuminal l, the pronunciation schl instead of sl and the raising of long ä and ö in front of r. We noticed that several morphosyntactic features of the older recordings were undergoing a leveling process, some features actually being at the end of such a process. This conclusion can be drawn by the fact that the informants, most of which are born in the late 19th century, show variation in their use of these variants. For instance an informant may for the third person reflexive pronoun switch between the traditional form säk, a transitional form sä and the standard form säj, while another informant may only use the standard form. In the newly recorded data no informants use the traditional säk.

Looking at today's dialect situation there is significant variation in the data. There is extensive variation in the use of both traditional dialect variants and new variants within the teenager group. There is also inter- and intraindividual variation as well as variation between groups. Of the 69 teenagers recorded, 18 are considered to speak a relatively traditional dialect (with 10 to 16 types of dialect variants), and 21 are considered fairly leveled (with 2 to 6 traditional dialect variants). No informant uses only standard variants; a characteristic of the data is that all informants use both

dialect and standard variants. The use of new variants also varies. Less than half of the teenagers recorded in Västergötland use a new variant. One informant has 7 new variants, the others between 1 and 4. None of these teenagers has Gothenburg variants; the new variants are rather what we call new standard or urban variants. There is a distinct difference between the teenagers in Västergötland and the informants recorded in the Stenungsund–Tjörn area in Bohuslän. In this area we observed such a high number of Gothenburg variants that it would be more adequate to describe the dialect of this area as a kind of Gothenburg variety. The teenagers recorded in Skärhamn use more traditional dialect features than the teenagers in Stenungsund. The informants in Uddevalla, further north in Bohuslän, do not use the Gothenburg variety, but, instead, have a linguistic profile similar to that of the teenagers in Västergötland, with the obvious difference that they also use traditional dialect variants of Bohuslän. Also, the new variants recorded in Västergötland can be found in Uddevalla as well. The teenagers in Uddevalla are similar to those in Skärhamn when it comes to the use of some of the traditional dialect variants, such as the pronunciation d for t in some word positions as well as the pronunciation sj instead of tj.

It is worth pointing out that we have only found a few apparent correlations between linguistic variation and non-linguistic variables such as geography, socioeconomic conditions, rural/urban living etc. The only apparent correlation is between linguistic variation and gender. In general, young men use more traditional dialect variants, both when it comes to types and tokens. Young women, on the other hand, use more new variants. We have not been able to correlate any social factors to a certain linguistic profile. Living in rural areas does not necessarily equal more dialect, and, vice versa, living in a city doesn't equal leveled dialect. The dialect situation appears to be dynamic and heterogeneous and it is difficult to discern any patterns in the variation.

A data-generated question is how the concept of dialect should be defined to fit in with the current dialect situation. Another aim has therefore been to discuss the concept of dialect. Not only have we realized that the traditional definition of dialect does not work. In the analysis of the so called new variants we have also had to consider whether they are potentially new dialect or new standard variants. We have simply chosen to call them new variants. These seem to be either new standard, urban or Gothenburg variants. The variants that we call new standard variants, for example the lowering of ö and ä, have previously been regarded as either urban and/or connected with youth language. We believe these variants to be part of many Swedish speakers' varieties, regardless of age or place of residence. The urban variants are found in the Gothenburg and Stockholm dialects and it is possible that they have spread from Gothenburg. Finally, there are the Gothenburg variants. We have only found these in the Stenungsund–Tjörn area and we believe that the Gothenburg variety has spread throughout this area. Furthermore, we have found that the new variants tend to be used more by relatively leveled speakers, which gives another dimension to the question of whether new variants should be considered part of the dialect system.

What to make of these new variants is investigated further in a new project headed by Jenny Nilsson: Dialect change in Rural Sweden. Within this project new variants in other parts of Sweden will be investigated. How do new features fit in to a traditional dialect system? Is it possible on a theoretical level to call them dialect variants or are they part of a change in the Swedish standard system?

There have not been any major studies on dialect leveling or any significant description of dialect use in Sweden for a few decades. Therefore, we have chosen to publish our results as a monograph. We have participated in many different scientific contexts to present our results, but we have not worked hard on publishing the presentations as articles. Hence, our most important publication is the monograph in progress. It will run to about 175 pages, including maps and diagrams, and will be published during 2012. In the years 2009 to 2011 we published a few articles, the most important being Nilsson's Dialect change? in *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 32(2).

We have been invited to present the project at the departments of Nordic languages or linguistics in Uppsala, Stockholm and Gothenburg. We have also been invited to different scientific events in Helsinki, Tvärminne, Åbo, Bergen, Tromsö, Copenhagen and Freiburg. Further, we have presented papers at national conferences and at the international conferences International Conference on Language Variation in Europe 4 and 5, and Sociolinguistics Symposium 17 and 18. This summer Nilsson will present papers at conferences in Germany and Canada, and Svahn is an invited plenary speaker at the conference *Svenskans beskrivning* this fall.

In addition we have presented the project at several popular science events. During field work we did interviews with several local papers. We have also presented our research to high school students, "senior university" and appeared on the Swedish public radio.

Publications

Nilsson, Jenny, u.u: Dialektal anpassning i interaktion. Kommer i: Bockgård, Gustav och Nilsson, Jenny (red.). *Interaktionell dialektologi*.

Nilsson, Jenny, 2010: Vad kan samtalsanalysen göra för dialektologin? I: *Svenskans beskrivning* 30. Förhandlingar vid trettionde sammankomsten för svenskans beskrivning. Stockholm 10–11/10 2008. Stockholm. S. 250–259.

Nilsson, Jenny, 2010: Dialektförändring eller metodförändring? I: *Språkhistoria – hur och för vem?* Studier i svensk språkhistoria, 10. Göteborg. S. 175–186.

Nilsson, Jenny, 2009: Dialect change? *Nordic Journal of Linguistics*, 32. S. 207–220.

Svahn, Margareta, 2010: Är götamålsskorningen död? Om r-bruket i västgötskan under 100 år. I: *Språkhistoria – hur och för vem?* Studier i svensk språkhistoria, 10. Göteborg. S. 243–251.