



How to choose between pronunciation goals when teaching Swedish as a second language

Bosse Thorén Dept. of Language Studies, Umeå University

High and realistic goals, suitable for adult learners with different capacities. How far will a strict linguistic-phonological analysis take us in communicative and educational reality?

If a native-like L2-pronunciation is the only acceptable learning target, every phonological and phonetic detail is of equal importance. Adult L2-learners seldom reach this goal. This has been discussed in the case of English by e.g. Jenkins (2000, 2002), for Swedish by Bannert (1984). Jenkins introduces the *Lingua Franca Core*, i.e. phonological and phonetic features assumed to be more crucial to intelligibility than others. Swedish is not a lingua franca in a global sense, but is used in Sweden and in Finland as a means of communication between native speakers with different regional accents and between native and non-native speakers and among non-native speakers

with different L1's. The suggestions for core features in Swedish phonology are based on empirical studies, structural circumstances and teaching experience. The suggestions include considerations as to what phonetic/acoustic details play a role in realizing the phonological contrasts.

In older didactic tradition, the features that were hard to learn got the highest priority and investment in time, regardless of their importance to communication (provided that pronunciation was taught at all). Among such features are the tonal word accents and a voiceless fricative [ɸ], that can be substituted by [f] or [s] with maintained clarity. And vowels, vowels, vowels...

The overview below shows 6 columns. Each phonological contrast can however be associated with a combination of acoustic cues. On the phonetic level there is often a combination of spectral, temporal and tonal features, signaling the contrast.

L2-speakers may perceive and produce a phonological contrast, but using other phonetic cues or combination of cues, resulting in a foreign accent

Overview of Swedish Phonology

Prosody			Segments / phonemes		
Stress	Length/quantity	Tone/intonation	Vowels	Consonants	Phonotactics and phonological processes
Distinctive stress on word level: 'Japan – ja 'pan 'Japan' – 'Japanese' 'Racket – ra 'ket 'racket' – 'rocket' On phrase level: 'Hälsa på någon 'to greet someone' Hälsa 'på någon 'to visit someone'	A quantity distinction involving complementary vowel and consonant duration as well as spectral difference between long and short vowel allophone tal – tall 'number' – 'pine' ful – full 'ugly' – 'full/drunk' etc.	A tonal word accent contrast, realized in higher prominence categories (accentuated and sentence/focal accent) Accent 1 (acute): ånden 'the duck' Accent 2 (grave): ånden 'the spirit'	9 vowel phonemes /a u ɛ o e i y ε ø/. /y ɛ ø/ are front rounded. Quality (timbre) difference between long and short vowel allophone; Substantial for /a/, /ɛ/ in most varieties, negligible for /ε ø/, and virtually absent in Finland-Swedish.	Voiced /b/ /d/ /g/ /j/ /l/ /m/ /n/ /r/ /v/ /ŋ/ Voiceless /f/ /h/ /k/ /p/ /s/ /t/ /ɸ/ /ç/ Stops /b/ /d/ /g/ /k/ /p/ /t/ Fricatives /f/ /h/ /j/ /s/ /ɸ/* /ç/ /v/ Nasals /m/ /n/ /ŋ/ Liquids /l/ /r/	0-3 consonants initially. If 3, the first must be /s/, the second a voiceless stop, and the third a voiced continuant. 0-5 consonants in final position, but examples are few. 3-4 is common. A de-voicing assimilation changes many voiced obstruents into voiceless allophones. /r/ + dental → supradentals /n/ adapts place of articulation to following obstruent: [ŋ] [m] [m] [ŋ] Some standardized reductions.

Stress is a clear candidate to core feature. It is the only phonemic contrast (in Swedish) that is empirically proven crucial for intelligibility (Bannert 1987 + a host of anecdotal evidence).
Stress interpreted as syllable prominence may be signaled by dynamic, temporal, spectral and tonal means. The most reliable perceptual cue to Swedish syllable prominence is increased duration of stressed syllables (Fant & Kruckenberg 1994). This finding is a good reason to combine stress realization with the strongly duration-dependent quantity contrast in education (Thorén 2008)

Tonal word accent is formally phonemic in those varieties utilizing it, but proven to be of less importance to intelligibility in practice. It has several regional kinds of realization and is neutralized in singing.
Tones in Swedish do probably have a more important role in telling the listener which words are "news" (rising pitch) and when the utterance is completed (falling pitch).
No distinct tonal patterns for statement or question.

Phonemes; vowels and consonants. The front rounded vowels /y ɛ ø/ are known to be rare in the worlds languages. From experience we can tell that L2-speakers make themselves understood without discerning all 9 vowel phonemes. The exact vowel quality varies between regions, as does the quality difference between long and short allophone.
The consonants are greater in number and also in possible combinations. A text where vowels are removed (or replaced by e.g. an asterisk) is much easier to read than a text where consonants are removed.

Realizing consonants and consonant clusters is crucial for intelligibility. Recent immigration from Vietnam, Thailand, China and Korea has shown that distorted consonant clusters often compromise intelligibility. Abrahamsson (2013) and Jenkins (2002, for English) claim that consonant deletion is more harmful than vowel epenthesis, as means of reducing consonant clusters.

Conclusion

General: give priority to features shared by most regional varieties and not to 'local specialties' even though they might be part of a high status variety.

Segments: Consonant realization and intact consonant clusters are more crucial to intelligibility than vowel quality.

Prosody: Stress and quantity are more crucial than the tonal word accents. Stress and quantity can be assumed to provide a temporal-rhythmical base for intelligible Swedish.

In didactic practice, the phonetic feature of duration is a very convenient means of promoting both the phonological contrasts of stress and quantity, since it is the main acoustic correlate (perceptual cue) to both. The teacher can kill two birds with one stone.

For an effective pronunciation teaching, one must take into account *phonological* factors, the relative weights of phonetic/acoustic cues in realizing the phonological contrasts, as well as knowledge about which features are easier and harder to learn and which features are crucial for intelligibility. More research in this area is required.

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