

# Observed pronunciation features in Swedish L2 produced by L1-speakers of Albanian

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## Abstract

*The number of immigrants with Albanian L1 has increased in Sweden during the last two decades. This particular group is also present in the SFI-classroom. This contribution aims to present pronunciation features in L2-Swedish produced by Albanian L1-speakers, based on recordings of two Albanian speakers living in Sweden.*

## Introduction

Since the mid-90s the migration of Albanian L1-speakers across European countries increased due to the Balkan-conflict and political changes in the country of Albania. According to the Swedish Migration Board ([www.migrationsverket.se](http://www.migrationsverket.se)), about 1300 immigrants from Kosovo and Albania have been granted permission of residence in 2012 alone.

Learning the local language is a major issue when establishing a new life in the new country. The number of participants with Albanian as L1 has increased in Swedish as a second language (Tronnier & Zetterholm, 2011).

In this contribution the sound inventory of the Albanian Language is given in a contrastive perspective, i.e. in comparison with Swedish. Furthermore, an investigation of observed pronunciation features in Swedish-L2 based on Albanian-L1 will be presented. Since Swedish L2-learners with Albanian L1 originate from both areas, the Republic of Albania and the Autonomous Province/Republic of Kosovo, two major Albanian dialects, Tosk and Gheg and their sound systems are taken into consideration.

## Albanian: typology and geography

Albanian is an Indo-European language which forms its own branch and is currently the official language in the Republic of Albania and one of the two official languages in the Autonomous Province/Republic of Kosovo. It also occurs as a minority language in other parts of Southern Europe.

There are two major Albanian dialects: Gheg and Tosk. Gheg is mainly found in Kosovo and northern Albania and Tosk is found in southern Albania. The Shkumbin river forms a rough dividing line, where a transitional zone between the two dialects can be found.

There has also been an effort to establish a standard variant, which has been subject to emotional and political debate (Moosmueller & Granser, 2003). Since 1972, a variant containing mainly elements from Tosk serves as Standard Albanian not only in the Republic of Albania. Vehbiu (1997) points out that the originally Gheg speaking cultural elite have also adopted the Standard variety.

Some differences between the sound systems of the two dialects are presented below.

## The Albanian sound system in comparison with Swedish

### Vowels

According to Moosmueller and Granser (2003), the Standard Albanian variety based on Tosk comprises seven vowels: /i y e ə a u o/. There is however quite some allophonic variation for these vowels not only between the different dialects, but also within each dialect. The latter applies specifically for the vowels /ə a/.

In addition, five distinctive nasal vowels can be found in Gheg (Garlén, 1988): /ĩ ÿ ě ã ũ/.

Except for the nasal vowels, all Albanian vowels occur in Swedish. On the other hand, coarticulatory vowel nasalisation is found in Swedish. Furthermore, Swedish has a higher number of vowel phonemes, where the vowels /ɤ ø/ are probably most divergent. In Swedish vowel length variation goes together with quality variation – specifically for /a/. Not using the right quality with the correct phonemic length might be a potential foreign accent feature for Albanian L1-speakers

### Consonants

The Tosk variant of Albanian has 29 consonantal phonemes, whereas Gheg has three more. Some consonantal phonemes of Albanian

do not occur in Swedish. The phonemes /ʃ ts tʃ/ are not exactly overlapping with the Swedish consonants, but are very similar, as there are /ɕ/ and /ts/. The latter is not an affricate, but a sequence of phonemes in syllable final position. /tɕ/ is used initially in the syllable in some dialects. The Swedish consonantal phoneme /ɧ/ does not occur in Albanian.

As becomes clear from the analysis in the L1-L2-map (Koreman et al., 2011) the voiceless stops are un-aspirated in Albanian, whereas they are clearly and strongly aspirated under several circumstances in Swedish.

### *Prosody and syllable structure*

According to Garlén (1988), stress is variable in placement and distinctive in both Albanian dialects, which is similar to Swedish. Garlén gives the minimal pair 'bari “the grass” and ba'ri “(shep-)herds” as examples. Lloshi (1999) however points out that stress is mainly fixed, and the rhythm is trochaic, which leads to stress on the penultimate syllable in most words.

For Tosk, no quantity distinction is found, a distinction which is found for Gheg. Moosmueller and Granser (2003) refer to long and short vowels in Gheg in their investigation on vowel quality variation in stressed syllables. It is unclear whether vowel quantity distinction only applies to stressed syllables or to unstressed syllables as well. Swedish has a complementary quantity distinction on stressed syllables, which results in rhyme patterns like a) a short vowel combined with a following long consonant or a consonant combination or b) a long vowel with a short or no following consonant.

No word accent distinction occurs in either of the two Albanian dialects, which is characteristic for Swedish. Word accents will however not be discussed here.

The syllable structure in Albanian allows between null and maximally two pre-vocalic consonants. The same is the case for the post-vocalic position (Garlén, 1988). The Swedish syllable structure is similar to the Albanian one, but allows up to three consonants pre-vocalically and in simplex words up to three consonants post-vocalically. In case of morphologically complex suffixing, further consonants may occur post-vocalically in Swedish.

## **The present study**

The current study is based on recordings made of two speakers of Albanian living in the southern part of Sweden. One male and one female speaker were recorded reading Swedish sentences, a short text and when describing a picture story. The sentences were compiled so that words containing all Swedish vowels and consonants and most of the Swedish consonant clusters were present in the material. Furthermore minimal words pairs contrasted by quantity characteristics, stress placement and word accents were built into the sentences. Many of these target words were also present in the short text and supplemented by further words, e.g. compound words.

Both speakers are originally from Kosovo and their dialect is Gheg. They were both in their 20s when they moved to Sweden. The Female speaker however has lived in the Republic of Albania for a longer period of time, where she earned a university degree. She is therefore familiar with the Tosk dialect and also speaks German and Serbo-Croatian. She has been living in Sweden for 27 years and took classes in Swedish language for only 3 months. The male speaker has been living in Sweden for four years at the time of recording and has studied Swedish for 2.5 years. Both speakers have a good enough command of Swedish to manage every day conversations. None of the speakers reports a comfortable command of English.

The recorded material was analyzed in an impressionistic way: when listening to the material, examples of non-L1 accented speech were extracted and transcribed. In many cases the phonetic features on which the foreign accent impression was based could already be pointed out by auditory observation only. Speech wave and spectrogram representations were used to get a closer look and a more detailed auditory impression.

## **Observed variation in Swedish L2**

### *In General*

Some pronunciation variation might have arisen due to the possibility that some words in the text might have been unknown to the readers. This could not easily be controlled for, because the investigation is part of larger study. In any case of a clear hesitation in the flow when reading the material, the observed variation was not considered any further. Other

pronunciation variations may be based on those Swedish letters which do not occur in the Albanian set of letters. These letters are *ä ö å* and are related to the phonemes / $\varepsilon \ \emptyset \ o$ /, but were mistaken for the letters *a o a* and pronounced as a variant of / $a \ o \ a$ /. This misinterpretation did not occur for all cases where these particular letters were present.

### Vowels

For both speakers the pronunciation of the Swedish vowel / $\text{y}$ / shows the clearest vocalic variation. This phoneme is by one speaker almost always and by the other speaker less frequently pronounced as [u]. For example the words *gul* “yellow” and *jul* “Christmas”, pronounced as [g $\text{y}$ :l] and [j $\text{y}$ :l] in Swedish, were pronounced as [gu:l] and [ju:l] by both speakers. This might be based on the misapprehension of the letter *u*, which represents a different phoneme in Albanian – which is /u/.

Other vocalic L1-features that occur in Swedish L2 are based on more complex factors and are presented below.

### Consonants

The most prominent consonantal feature is the consistent pronunciation variation of /r/. There are many different allophones for /r/ in Swedish, between and within the different dialects. The variants, which the two Albanian speakers use were neither of the allophones in Swedish or were misplaced. In the recordings one speaker almost always uses [ɹ], which is also found in English. Note that the speaker did not report any knowledge of English. If the /r/ occurred in word final position she also used strongly rhoticised vowels instead of a sequence of V+/r/. In that respect the final syllable of the word *hjälper* “helps” is pronounced [pɛɹ]. The variant the other speaker used is the apical trill [r]. This is one of the Swedish /r/-variants, but scarcely used and hardly ever in unstressed syllables, function words or in syllable final position. Making use of the repetitive trill in all positions results in a very prominent /r/-sound, which deviates from the impression of what the Swedish language should sound like.

Both speakers often add a homorganic stop after the velar nasal, when in intervocalic position: the word *många* “many” is pronounced as [mɔŋga] or [mɔŋga] instead of [mɔŋa]. Vowel nasalization rather than sequencing V+C<sub>nas</sub> are discussed below.

In Swedish, word initial voiceless stops are usually aspirated, when in a stressed syllable and not part of a consonant cluster: *tall* “pine tree” is pronounced [t<sup>h</sup>al:]. The Albanian speakers in most cases either do not produce any aspiration or produce short/weak aspiration and the example above becomes [tal:]. There seems however to be a certain distribution when aspiration is produced and when it lacks. In that sense, aspiration lacks mainly when a frontal stop encounters a back vowel, no matter if the syllable is stressed or not: as in *polis* “police” becomes [pɔ'li:s] and *tomat* “tomato” [tɔ'ma:t], *pappa* “dad” [ˈpap:a] and *taket* “the roof” [ˈta:kə<sup>h</sup>].

On the other hand, when a back stop (i.e. a velar stop) encounters a back vowel – as in *kallas* “is called” [k<sup>h</sup>al:as] or a frontal stop (an alveolar stop) encounters a front vowel [i y] – as in *tid* “time” [t<sup>h</sup>i:d], the aspiration is correctly produced after the stop.

An additional accent feature produced by the two Albanian L1-speakers is final-obstruent devoicing. The Swedish word *golv* “floor” [gɔlv] is produced with a final devoicing, which results in [gɔlv̥]. The word *ägg* “egg” [ɛg:] is produced as [ɛg̥:<sup>h</sup>], which not only includes final devoicing, but furthers the impression of voicelessness by the aspiration of the stop. Another example shows devoicing medially in a compound word: *guldpapper* “gold glittering paper” becomes [gulɖ<sup>h</sup>papɛr] – where stress misplacement also occurs.

In that way, aspiration lacks where expected – which is word initially – and occurs where it doesn't belong, i.e. with a word final devoiced stop, which should be voiced.

Swedish has two fricatives / $\varepsilon \ \text{ɧ}$ /, which are produced with double articulations in most dialects. The alveolo-palatal fricative [ $\varepsilon$ ] – as in *kök* “kitchen” [ $\varepsilon$ ø:k] – is mostly replaced by the somewhat darker [ʃ], which occurs in Albanian. The fricative [ɧ] as in *sjö* “lake” [ɧø:] is also replaced by [ʃ] by one speaker. The other speaker shifts between [ʃ] and [x]. The latter sound is a dialectal allophone of / $\text{ɧ}$ /, but is usually not produced as similarly strong in the corresponding dialect as by the Albanian L1-speaker when speaking Swedish L2.

### Prosody

Stress is placed on the wrong syllable in many compound and simplex words by both speakers. It occurs many times on the penultima syllable, a regular place for stress in

Albanian, but it may be misplaced on other syllables, too. Examples where the stress is misplaced on the penultima syllable are: *'läraren* “the teacher”, *'arbetar* “works” and *'grön,saker* “vegetable” become *\*lä'raren*, *\*ar'betar* and *\*grön'saker*.

Stress misplacement onto the final syllable occurs in: *'salu,hall* “market hall” and *'konst,bok* “a book about arts”. They become *\*salu'hall* and *\*konst'bok*.

Also in the flow of speech prominence variation produced by the Albanian L1-speakers is not always applied correctly. In a neutral utterance in Swedish, pronouns, clitics and auxiliaries are usually less prominent and in a sequence of adjective + noun, the noun is more prominent: *Hade 'på sig* “was wearing”, *,vackert 'väder* “nice weather” and *,vid 'jul* “at christmas” become *\*Hade på 'sig*, *\*'vackert ,väder* and *\*'vid jul*.

Quantity aspects are in many cases not handled accurately by the two L1-speakers of Albanian. The words of minimal pairs as in: *väggen* “the wall” vs. *vägen* “the road”, *löss* “lice” vs. *lös* “loose” and *villan* “the house” vs. *vilan* “the recreation” are hardly distinguished in pronunciation, favoring the words containing the long vowels, i.e. *vägen*, *lös* and *vilan*. This feature also occurs in words, not being part of a minimal pair: *semester* “vacation” [sə'mestɛɹ] becomes [sə'me:stɛɹ].

The contrast between a stressed and an unstressed syllable is not always as clear and explicit as one would expect for Swedish. This is based on an alteration of length distinction in the rhyme, where the two Albanian L1-speakers seem to produce similar rhyme length for stressed and unstressed syllables.

### Complex variations

Sequences of V+C<sub>nas</sub> are very much influenced by assimilation. Nasalisation of vowels does occur in Swedish, but in many cases the Albanian L1-speakers replaced the whole sequence with a nasal vowel, which sounds unnaturally marked in Swedish: *Man kan* “one can” [man kan] and *glänste* “shone” [glɛnstə] become [mã kã] and [glɛ̃stə]. As the two speakers' dialect is Ghëg – where nasal vowels are part of the sound system – they were apparently applying them in Swedish.

Other examples of inappropriate assimilation can be found in the regressive voicing of /s/ in *Israel* (name of the country) – [z] never occurs in Swedish – and progressive devoicing for /v/

in *kvällen* “the evening” and *två* “two” which does not result in a somewhat weaker devoiced [v̥], but in a very prominent [f].

Favoring long vowels over short ones is not equally clear for /a/, where a mismatch with the corresponding vowel quality occurred in words containing the Swedish phoneme /a/, a phoneme which requires the quality of [a] in the case of a long vowel in a stressed syllable and [a] in the case of a corresponding short one. Both speakers also prefer [a] for the long vowel, so that *vas* “vase” correctly pronounced [va:s] becomes [va:s].

### Summary and outlook

Although the investigated L1-speakers of Albanian are well understood when speaking Swedish L2, the most prominent pronunciation variation is based on the inaccurate choice of sounds for the phonemes /ɸ/ and /r/, un-aspirated stops, final devoicing, stress misplacement and inaccurate vowel quantity sometimes combined with incorrect vocalic quality. Stress misplacement and the production of inaccurate vowel quantity can lead to misunderstandings, as stress serves as an anchor point to attention and variation in vowel quantity can lead to the wrong word.

An interesting finding was that the stressed and unstressed syllables in L2 were of comparable strengths. An NPVI-analysis could shed further light on that relationship.

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