LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN MULTILINGUAL SETTINGS IN STOCKHOLM, GOTHENBURG AND MALMÖ

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1. Introduction

Many linguists in Sweden today are in agreement that the most interesting developments in the Swedish language are taking place in the multilingual communities on the outskirts of the three major cities Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. A group of research teams in the three cities has received funding for a project to study the phonological, grammatical and lexical characteristics of the variety –or varieties– of language spoken by young people in these communities. Fourteen people, both researchers and phd students, are connected to the project and altogether seven phd theses will be written within its frames. We aim to answer a wide range of questions. First of all we will explore if it is possible to distinguish a variety of multiethnic youth language (in each of the three cities) as distinct from learner language and other local youth varieties. We also want to find out if these multiethnic varieties are used by both bilinguals and (Swedish) monolinguals. Another aim is to describe the characteristics of these varieties –as regards lexicon, pronunciation, grammar, and discourse. Earlier studies, e.g. Kotsinas (1994), on the so called "Rinkeby Swedish" (Rinkeby being a multicultural suburb of Stockholm) have suggested some differences in the use of prepositions, word order (e.g. verb-subject inversion), assignment of grammatical gender and prosody (Kotsinas (ibid.) speaks of an "uneven", "choppy" prosody). It is also important to explore what function the multiethnic varieties have in the repertoire

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of language varieties available to the young speakers, i.e. when and with whom they use these varieties.

In current Swedish discourse on segregated housing and on bilingual children's school accomplishments, there is an often expressed belief that children growing up in multilingual communities such as Rinkeby in Stockholm, Rosengard in Malmö and Angered in Gothenburg do not learn "proper" Swedish due to the insufficient contact with native Swedish. Related to this, there is an abundance of diverse beliefs regarding the development of new non-standard varieties of Swedish, e.g. "Rinkeby Swedish". Judging by the speakers' own remarks "Rinkeby Swedish" should be seen as a multiethnic youth language, but by others it is perceived as a local simplified immigrant dialect or sometimes even as a threat to "The Swedish Language". One aim of the project will be to investigate these issues and also see in what ways multiethnic youth language may influence, or come to influence, other varieties of Swedish.

2. Subjects

The sample is made up by 200 students in the second year of upper secondary school (Sw. 'gymnasium') studying a theoretical program (in most cases the program for social sciences). In each of the three cities the informants were recruited from two classes in two different schools, one from a school with a large proportion of students with foreign background and the other from a school with less (but still a significant number of) students with foreign background. We looked at the social and demographic characteristics of all the schools in the three cities, and then went on to select the schools which best matched our preferences. In Stockholm the research team decided to involve a third school as well. There are several multilingual and multicultural areas in Stockholm, some of which show interesting differences. We therefore thought it interesting to explore these (possible) local differences.

We had several reasons for choosing students from the second year of upper secondary school. When adolescents in Sweden start upper secondary school (Sw. 'gymnasium') it is often the first time they attend school outside their local environment (where they have grown up and gone to compulsory school). In the new school they become part of new peer groups and their social networks expand. They are therefore

likely to come into contact with a larger variety of spoken Swedish than they have before.

> [...] adolescent peer groups act as a mechanism for maintaining the vernacular, which is seen as the special property of the group. But as adolescents become older and involved in a wider range of social situations, they gradually acquire a range of superposed standard-influenced styles. Furthermore, they encounter more occasions for switching towards the standard, and consequently, the argument goes, use their original vernacular less and less.   (Labov, 1972, cited in Milroy, 1987: 58)

Our subjects are likely to be in the middle of the process referred to above and we therefore expect them to use a wide variety of language styles, ranging from vernacular to "standard".

The second year of upper secondary school was also chosen out of convenience. The informants have had time to get to know each other and their new educational environment. They will also stay in this environment for the next two years, which is an advantage for us in the data collection process. Should we need more than the six to ten months planned for the collection of data we have the opportunity to continue.

3. Data collection

In the project we will try to collect data that all, or most of the project members, will benefit from. The Phd students will also collect some data specific for their theses. In order to capture the wide range of the youths' linguistic repertoires we need to make recordings in many different contexts.

During the spring of 2002 the project members responsible for the data collection tried to spend as much time as possible with the subjects, participating and spending time in the different schools. Some pilot recordings were made, both to make the subjects used to the recording equipment and to try out how well different recording situations worked. This was also a way of getting to know the subjects better, letting them grow accustomed to the data collectors, and defuse the research issue. In the fall 2002 the collection of the data began. Below we present some types of data that we plan to collect.

3.1. Structured interviews

Background information on the informants has been collected through structured interviews based on a questionnaire. The aim of these interviews is to explore each

subject's linguistic background, linguistic environment, patterns of language use in different domains, age when first exposed to Swedish, length of residence in Sweden, length of residence in the multilingual urban area, the parents' socio-economic background, and the informant's perception of his/her own competence in Swedish. The interviews were carried out at the beginning of the fall semester, before any other data collection started.

3.2. Group conversations

We will audiorecord the subjects while they particpate in three different kinds of group conversations; free, guided, and focus group conversations. One aim of these recordings is to see how context and topic influence the language use of the group participants.

3.2.1. Free group conversations

The free group conversations do not follow any predetermined guidelines. Groups of 3-4 people are recorded while engaging in a spontaneous conversation. The subjects in each group should know each other well in order to speak spontaneously. In a peer group there is a pressure on the members to speak in accordance with the group norm (Nordberg, 1982: 107). There will be one group with girls only, one with boys only, and one mixed group. Altogether 3 free group conversations will be recorded in each class and no researcher will be present during these recordings.

3.2.2. Guided group conversations

In the guided group conversations a teacher in each class picks a conversation subject. Groups of 3-4 people are then recorded while engaging in a discussion on this subject. There will be three guided group conversations, one girl group, one boy group and one mixed group, in each of the classes. No researcher will be present during the recordings. The purpose of these recordings is to see how the topic of conversation influences the language use.

3.2.3. Focus group conversations

In the focus groups one of the project members will pick a discussion subject and act as moderator of the conversation. As in the recordings of the other group

conversations the focus group recordings will be made with one girl group, one boy group and one mixed group in each class.

3.3. Self recordings

A few subjects in each class will be asked to carry out self-recordings. These subjects should preferably be self recruited.

During the self-recordings the informants will be equipped with a mini-disc/tape recorder and a microphone to record his/her interaction with peers, family etc in different situations throughout a day. Since it is unknown how the recording equipment influences the way subjects speak it is advisable to let the informants carry out their self-recordings on several days "to let the novelty wear off" (Eriksson, 1997: 54, our translation). The aim of the self-recordings is to catch the everyday speech of the informants in a natural way.

3.4. Presentations

To catch a more formal language use we also wish to record the subjects while making an oral presentation in front of the class. The content of these presentations will be decided by the teachers. Approximately six subjects in each class will be audio and video recorded while making a presentation.

3.5. Field notes

In a project as large as this, and involving as many people as this one does, it is sometimes difficult to make sure everything is made equally. Ideally the data collection procedures, the context and all the information given to the subjects should be the same in all schools in all three cities. In order to keep track of what the situation is like at the different recording sessions we all write detailed field notes on everything that is going on during the collection of the data.

4. Two Phd-theses within the project

4.1. The syntax of multiethnic youth languages

The focus of Ganuza (in progress) is to look closer at the syntax of the multiethnic youth language varieties in comparison to other Swedish varieties. The main focus will be on word order and placement of negations and certain adverbs. As

mentioned above, Kotsinas (e.g. 1994) has pointed to some differences in the word order of the speakers of the so called "Rinkeby Swedish". These will be explored in the present material as will questions regarding which subjects show these differences, and whether or not they do so in all contexts and with all interlocutors.

One important aim is to see how the use of the mentioned structures can be related to learner language, and whether the variation in their use could perhaps be explained by Pienemann's (1998) processability theory.

4.2. Politeness in Swedish as a second language

A central question of Utrzén Milinkovic (in progress) is if there is a universal principle of politeness, and, if so, how this principle is related to differences between cultures. The aim is to shed light on how politeness is defined for those who have Swedish as a second language and how politeness is connected to different cultural and social structures. The family is often regarded as a neutral area where politeness is more or less unnecessary. A more thorough investigation of family interaction will therefore be an important part of this thesis.

In addition, Utrzén Milinkovic will study how politeness differs from respect, tact or consideration.The difference between linguistic and non-linguistic politeness is not clear cut. Finally, the researcher wants to investigate whether emotions have an effect on politeness. Swearing, which is one of the most common ways of expressing feeling and also regarded as an extremely impolite way of doing so, will be the focus of this discussion.

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