Phonological Constraints on Code Switching: A Case Study of South Estonian

The paper at hand describes the language use of the inhabitants of Sute village in south-eastern Estonia. The authors recorded speech examples of 31 informants, altogether 24 hours of material. The informants differ in terms of age, sex, and education. They speak the local Võru South Estonian dialect which differs considerably from Standard Estonian. The data were already analyzed in the VARBRUL-studies of inessive forms (Pajusalu et al. 1999) and past participles (Mets 2004). In both of these studies variable use of dialect and standard forms was detected on several levels of language structure. This paper will focus on the phonology of non–dialectal utterances that appear in spontaneous speech.

The study of phonological constraints of non–dialectal utterances is favored in our data by the fact that the basic phonological rules of Standard Estonian and South Estonian are sharply different. There is no vowel harmony, for example, in Standard Estonian, yet the latter appears consistently in South Estonian where it is observable in practically any word (see Kiparsky, Pajusalu 2003). The authors will focus their analysis on ambiguous non–dialectal utterances and try to answer the question of whether these represent cases of code switching or lexical borrowing.

Our analysis shows that an overwhelming majority of non–dialectal utterances have not fully adapted to the sound system of South Estonian. Therefore it is unnatural to consider them ordinary borrowings. For instance, the Standard Estonian *möödunud* 'last' is often used instead of the South Estonian *minevä*. According to the South Estonian phonological rules the loanword should be pronounced as *möötünütt*. Unadapted forms are used even in the function of an attribute that precedes the dialectal head, e.g. *möödunud suvõ* 'last summer' (cf. Standard Estonian *suvel*). However, there exist a set of constraints for the limited phonological adaptation of such forms. These could mostly be interpreted as a specific type of markedness constraints. The paper will seek to demonstrate that it is possible to follow some stages of transition from code switching to lexical borrowing using OT-phonology.

References

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