Phonological schematicity in Interscandinavian comprehension
Anna Hagel
Kiel University

The Continental Scandinavian languages are generally considered to be mutually intelligible, mainly because a substantial proportion of their lexicons consists of cognates. However, while written communication seems to be relatively unproblematic, studies have repeatedly shown that comprehension can be seriously impaired in oral communication (Maurud 1976, Delsing & Lundin Åkesson 2005). One reason for this is that pronunciation differences obscure lexical similarities that might be easily recognisable in written form. Spoken Danish in particular tends to cause problems in this respect – especially for Swedes, but also for Norwegians. Despite this, communicating across the language boundaries is a common practice in many Interscandinavian contexts.

While this communication mode has been discussed from a range of different perspectives in Interscandinavian communication research, except for Bannert (1981) and Braunmüller (1995), hardly any researchers have adopted a cognitivist view on the phenomenon of Interscandinavian comprehension so far. At the same time, cognitivist or constructionist research has scarcely attended to the subject of intercomprehension either, although the communicative setting is far less exceptional than it might seem at first sight. After all, interdialectal communication, too, requires hearers to decode words that exhibit only partial phonological overlap to the equivalents in their own L1.

However, the intercommunicative decoding strategies proposed by Braunmüller (1995) tie in neatly with assumptions from current constructionist approaches. Most importantly, Braunmüller names (i) the identification of partial similarities and differences and (ii) the use of established interlingual correspondence rules, of which (i) represents a prerequisite for (ii). The establishment of such interlingual correspondence rules can best be described within the framework of a multilingually oriented approach like, e.g., Diasystematic Construction Grammar (DCxG) (Höder 2019). According to DCxG, hearers exposed to bilingual input would start generalising across forms exhibiting the same sound correspondence and eventually develop a partially schematic cross-linguistic construction, a so-called diaconstruction, containing a slot that can be filled with appropriate material from either variety, thereby specifying language membership. As such, it could also be applied to new input.

Constructionist approaches like DCxG thus offer useful descriptive tools and promising new perspectives on intercommunicative decoding, but there still remains a lack of empirical research providing evidence on how the decoding strategies used by hearers really change as the hearers' receptive knowledge increases. The role of phonological schematicity seems to be central in this respect. The PhD project presented in the talk therefore addresses a number of questions revolving around phonological schematicity in Interscandinavian decoding: How much input do hearers need to start generalising? How do hearers deal with different degrees of input variability? How do segmental and suprasegmental structures interact in this context? In order to answer these questions, a series of psycholinguistic experiments shall be conducted in which Swedish participants are induced to identify, learn and apply Danish-Swedish phonological correspondence rules. The results are expected to provide evidence for the use of constructions with different degrees of schematicity in different stages of receptive proficiency and shall form the basis for the development of a cognitivist constructionist model of Interscandinavian decoding.

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