The present study is devoted to pronunciation and phonological transfer, more specifically the pronunciation of stops and consonant clusters in L2-Swedish produced by L1-speakers of Sgaw Karen. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how L1 Karen speakers learn Swedish and how they become aware of and negotiate typological differences between the languages. Karen is a SinoTibetan language and described as having a three-way contrast for plosives. It consists of unvoiced aspirated stops \([p^h t^h k^h]\), unvoiced unaspirated stops \([p t k \emptyset]\) and voiced stops \([b d]\) or voiced implosive-like stops \([b d]\) in word-initial and word-medial positions (Fischer 2013). The syllable structure of Sgaw Karen includes \(C_1(C_2)VT\) (T=tone). \(C_1\) can be any consonantal phoneme, but \(C_2\) is restricted to one out of five \([w l \gamma r j]\) depending on \(C_1\). As other SinoTibetan languages Karen has a monosyllabic structure and if closed syllables appear they can only end with a glottal stop. In Swedish, there are some complex onsets and codas. In addition, triconsonantal clusters are allowed. Recordings of spontaneous speech show that learners insert an epenthesis vowel in their production of consonant clusters. In final position consonants are either reduced or a schwa is added at the end. It is obvious that the typological differences between Sgaw Karen and Swedish cause problems since L1-Swedish listeners report the L2-learner accent as unintelligible. This result raises questions about how the teaching of Swedish as a second language can be developed to focus on individual training concerning pronunciation.

References:


Keywords: Karen language, phonology, intelligible accent, pronunciation.