Dialect change in rural and urban Sweden

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Dialects level towards standard in many European locations. This is also the case in Sweden: several recent studies on dialect change in areas close to larger cities conclude this. It is also apparent that new linguistic features have started to gain ground in these areas. However, we don’t know as much about the situation in more rural areas further away from cities, and the project Dialect Change in Rural Sweden investigates dialect change in such areas.

The project is concerned with how dialects in rural parts of Sweden have changed since the mid 20th century and if the process for this change is similar in different dialect areas. Speakers’ realization of approx. 50 phonological and morphological variables as dialect- or standard variants in three rural locations is analyzed, both in newly recorded data as well as data recorded in the same locations in 1940-50. The results are compared to those from studies dealing with language change in more urban areas of Sweden.

In this presentation I focus on dialect change in the small rural villages Torsby and Edsbyn and compare them both with rural West Sweden as well as the urban area surrounding Gothenburg, Sweden’s second largest city. The situation in Torsby and Edsbyn is very similar to the one in rural West Sweden, even though the degree of leveling varies significantly between the three locations. In all these locations vertical convergence is under way. However, in the more linguistically traditional Torsby and Edsbyn there are no signs of new urban linguistic features, where as these are gaining ground in the more leveled rural West Sweden. These new features are very common in the urban areas surrounding Gothenburg, where there appears to be an on-going dialect shift.

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