

Has the palatalization system of Estonian insular dialect been preserved on Saaremaa?

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The purpose of this paper is to find out whether the palatalization system of Estonian insular dialect has been preserved on the island Saaremaa. Previous descriptions of the palatalization system of Western Estonian islands have found that in *i*-stemmed words all alveolars can be palatalized only if **i* of an unstressed syllable is lost (Viitso 2003: 190). The acoustics of palatalization of Estonian insular dialect have not been studied before. In Standard Estonian one of the main characteristics of palatalization is the rise of F2 value in the end of the vowel before palatalized consonant (Lehiste 1965: 138–139). For that reason, F2 values of vowels preceding consonants were analyzed in this study.

Monosyllabic *i*-stemmed words ending with a long alveolar consonant or consonant cluster were studied. The consonants occurred after back vowels /a/, /o/, /u/. Test words were in different cases, where the geminate or consonant cluster was (a) in the end of monosyllabic words or (b) in disyllabic words with /i/ as the second syllable vowel. The words were embedded in a text, which was read by 24 speakers (aged 18–80, mean age 45) from three different regions of Saaremaa. If F2 raised significantly in the end of the vowel, the following consonant was considered to be palatalized.

The results show that there is variation in palatalizing consonants. The palatalization is affected by the consonant, the preceding vowel, speaker's age, sex and dialectal background. Older speakers, especially men are more consistent in using the palatalization system that is characteristic to the Estonian insular dialect. Among younger people it is more common to also palatalize the consonant preceding /i/, which means that their pronunciation is affected by Standard Estonian.

Keywords: Estonian dialects, palatalization

References

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