Half-length of the second syllable vowel as a characteristic of Estonian CVCV-words

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Our paper investigates variation in the realisation of Estonian CVCV-words. The phonologically short unstressed vowel in the second syllable (V2) is pronounced longer than the short stressed vowel in the first syllable (V1), and therefore, traditionally, V2 is referred to as half-long. Various studies have addressed duration ratios of CVCV-words in Estonian as well as in other Finnic languages, but very few have treated this issue from the point of view of regional variation or accentuation conditions. Our aim is to find out what causes variation in duration ratios of CVCV-words.

Earlier research reveals considerable differences in the duration ratios of CVCV-words in Standard Estonian. In words pronounced in isolation, the V2/V1 ratio is around 2; in read speech, it varies between 1.2 and 1.9, and in spontaneous speech it is around 1.5 (e.g. Lehiste 1968; Lippus et al. 2013; Krull 1992, 1997). It has been demonstrated that the ratio is bigger in prepausal position than elsewhere (Lehiste 1968; Krull 1997) and in accented than in deaccented words (Lippus et al. 2013). It has also been shown that the ratio varies due to the speakers’ regional background: it is bigger (1.7–1.8) in Insular and Southern Estonian and smaller in North-Eastern Coastal and Eastern Estonian (1.1–1.2) (Sepp 1980; Wiik 2006).

Our preliminary analysis of duration ratios in CVCV-words pronounced by speakers from five regions of Estonia showed that regional background does not affect duration ratios significantly, as irrespectively, the second syllable vowel is pronounced as half-long. However, there is considerable interspeaker variation. The results suggest that the variation of duration ratios depends strongly on the vowel category, but is also affected by accentuation, as shown earlier.

References


