

The loss of /h/ affecting the quantity patterns: The case of South Estonian Leivu dialect

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The South Estonian Leivu dialect was spoken in northern Latvia, near the southern border of Estonia, until the 1980s (Nigol 1988). The Leivu dialect shares features with the South Estonian Western Võru dialect (cf. Nigol 1955). However, it has also undergone several changes influenced by contacts with the Latvian language (cf. Nigol 1955; Vaba 1997). Changes in the Leivu dialect show similarities with the Livonian language, another Baltic-Finnic language that has also been in contact with Latvian (Viitso 2009). One shared innovation is the loss of /h/ in these two languages (Viitso 2009). In Livonian, the loss of /h/ is complete, whereas in Leivu, the loss of word-internal /h/ concerns words in the first (Q1) and second (Q2) quantity degrees. In the third (Q3) quantity degree words, /h/ is long and has been retained (Viitso 2009), e.g., *liha* (Q1) [lia:] ‘meat’, *raha* (Q1) [ra:] ~ [ra:a] ‘money’, *lehmaq* (Q2) [l̥e:maʔ] ‘cow, pl.nom’; but in Q3 *lehma* [leh:ma] ‘cow, sg.prt’, *tahtse* [tah:tse] ‘I wanted’.

Previous research on Leivu has indicated that the loss of /h/ from disyllabic Q1 words can result in two kinds of vowel duration ratios: in some cases, the first vowel is pronounced longer (duration ratio 1.6), while in other cases, the second vowel is pronounced longer (ratio 0.6–0.7) (Teras 2021). This variation in duration ratios also characterizes Leivu Q1 words: sometimes V2 is pronounced longer (ratio 0.8, Teras 2010), like in common Estonian (ratio 0.8, Lippus et al. 2013). In other cases, V1 is pronounced longer (ratio 1.5, Teras 2010), resembling the ratio found in common Estonian Q2 words (ratio 1.8, Lippus et al. 2013).

This paper aims to find out how the loss of /h/ affects the quantity patterns in Q2 words. The spontaneous speech of three male speakers is analysed acoustically. Sound durations in Q2 words, where word-internal /h/ is lost from between voiced sounds, are measured, and duration ratios are calculated. Preliminary results indicate that the loss of /h/ results in three kinds of patterns: 1) the loss of /h/ lengthens the first syllable’s short vowel (e.g., *lehmaq* [l̥e:maʔ]); 2) the loss of /h/ lengthens both the preceding vowel and the following consonant (e.g., *lehmaq* [l̥e:m:aʔ]); 3) the loss of /h/ does not affect the duration of the neighbouring sounds, and the Q2 word is pronounced like a Q1 word (e.g., *lehmaq* [l̥ema]). Duration ratios in words exhibiting these three patterns will be discussed in more detail in the presentation.

References

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