The role of extra-linguistic factors for intelligibility

Extra-linguistic factors

- Contact
- Attitudes
- Linguistic experience
- Orthography

May result in asymmetric mutual intelligibility

Contact

- Prior experience with the test language results in higher scores
- Maurud (1976) only tested Scandinavians from the capitals
- Bø (1978): subjects who could watch TV from the neighbouring countries performed better in intelligibility tests

How can contact be measured?

1. Translations of non-cognates: In principle unintelligible. Number of correctly translated cognates is an indication of experience with the test language
2. Questions

INS-investigation

The project Internordisk sprogforståelse, INS (Inter Nordic comprehension)
- Delsing & Lundin Åkesson 2005
- Test languages: Danish, Norwegian, Swedish
- Questionnaire about attitude and contact
INS-investigation:
Test persons: 690 secondary school pupils between 16 and 19 years

Task: open questions about a spoken text
› news item (250 words)
› read aloud in Danish, Norwegian or Swedish
› 5 open questions

Questions about contact:
I watch Danish/Norwegian/Swedish TV
once a week □ once a month □ once a year □ more seldom □
I read Danish/Norwegian/Swedish newspapers/magazines
once a week □ once a month □ once a year □ more seldom □
I meet Danes/Norwegians/Swedes
once a week □ once a month □ once a year □ more seldom □
I am in Denmark/Norway/Sweden
once a week □ once a month □ once a year □ more seldom □

Correlation between intelligibility and contact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Type</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>$r = .18$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspaper</td>
<td>$r = .30$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal contact</td>
<td>$r = .27$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visit</td>
<td>$r = .02$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total contact</td>
<td>$r = .19$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

no significant correlations

Contact
› It is plausible that contact plays a role for intelligibility
› Still statistic relationships have hardly been found
› Scandinavians have little contact
Attitudes

A positive attitude towards a language will motivate people to try and understand that language, whereas a negative attitude will hinder intelligibility.

Ex. Wolff (1966) from Eastern Niger Delta:
- Speakers of Nembe claim to be able to understand Kalabari, while Kalabari find Nembe unintelligible.
- Explained by the economically strong position of the Kalabari.

INS-investigation

Questions about attitudes:
- How do you like the Danish language?
  - Beautiful
  - Ugly
- Would you like to live in Denmark?
  - Yes
  - Maybe
  - No

Correlation between intelligibility and attitude

Correlation between intelligibility and attitude:
- Live in: $r = .20$
- Beautiful: $r = .56^{**}$
- Total attitude: $r = .50^*$
Correlation between intelligibility and attitude

- Phonetic similarity vs. test results
- Swedish: $r = .81$
- Norwegian: $r = .78$

attitudes

- It is plausible that attitudes play a role in intelligibility
- Still statistic relationships are not very strong
- The test situations are likely to block attitudes

Linguistic experience

Hypothesis:
Multilingualism may result in a better comprehension of closely related languages due to a larger language consciousness

Berthele (2009):

Listeners:
- 168 speakers of Standard German without dialect competence
- 82 speakers of standard German with dialect competence

Intelligibility tests:
- Dutch and Swedish

Results:
- Listeners with dialect competence had higher intelligibility scores
Norwegians have experience with linguistic variation:
- strong position of dialects in Norway
- two written languages

Can this be an explanation for the fact that they understand Danish and Swedish so well?

Repetition of Danish dialect experiment in Norway

**Hypothesis:** Norwegians understand closely related varieties better than Danes (and Swedes).
Correlation between intelligibility of 100 frequent Swedish word by Danish listeners and phonetic distances: $r = .54$

Corrected for orthography: $r = .64$