

Phonetics & Phonology

Homework 3: Segment Inventory of Estonian

Due Tuesday, February 9

The following descriptions of the the sounds of Estonian is taken from *Basic Course in Estonian, Second Edition* by Felix J. Oinas, published in 1966 as part of the Uralic and Altaic Series (Thomas A Seveok, editor) by Indiana University Publications. Consider the description of each sound (represented here with the spelling system of the language) and then make a vowel and consonant chart for Estonian, **using the appropriate IPA symbols**. (When making your consonant chart, be sure to include only the places and manners needed for the language.) Discuss any points of interest. After formulating your charts, comment on them from the point of view of markedness and dispersion theory as introduced in class. Give some discussion of these concepts, with reference to the Estonian segment inventory.

1 Vowels

The Estonian i is pronounced with about the same tongue position as the English i in *beat*. The front part of the tongue rises high up toward the front of the hard palate, leaving there a very narrow air canal. The lips are spread as wide as possible.

When pronouncing the Estonian e, the tongue has about the same position as with the English e in *bet*. You will note that the tongue has been somewhat lowered from the position it had when pronouncing the Estonian i.

The Estonian ä is like the first vowel in English *matter*. However, the mouth is opened more widely and the tongue lowered slightly more.

The vowel ü is pronounced with the same tongue position as i, but the lips are rounded and pulled forward. There is a small round opening between the lips.

The vowel ö is pronounced with the same tongue position as e, but the lips are rounded pulled forward. Between the lips there is a small oval opening.

For the pronunciation of the õ sound, the o should be formed and then the lips unrounded without changing the position of the tongue.

The vowel u is pronounced with a higher tongue position than the English u in *boot*. Also the lips are somewhat more protruded and there is a small round opening between them.

For the pronunciation of the o, the back of the tongue should be raised, but not as high as for the u; the lips form a round opening.

The vowel a is pronounced with the tongue lying on the bottom of the mouth, but slightly retracted. The mouth is opened wide.

2 Consonants

Estonian stops are unaspirated voiceless, conventionally spelled as b, d, g.

The Estonian s is pronounced with the tongue forming a slit with the alveolar ridge, much like the English s.

The Estonian h is simply a soft breath of air.

The Estonian m is pronounced as the m in English.

When pronouncing n, the tip and the front part of the tongue are against the upper teeth. When n precedes the phoneme k, it is pronounced like the English ng in *singer*.

l is pronounced so that the tip and the front part of the tongue are against the upper teeth.

The Estonian r is pronounced with the tongue trilling against the alveolar ridge.

When pronouncing v, the lower lip is brought against the edge of the upper teeth. The air passing through makes a sound due to friction.

The Estonian j is pronounced much like the English y in *you* and *yes*.

In addition to the phonemes mentioned, f and š appear in Estonian, primarily in words of foreign origin. Their pronunciation is like that of f and sh in English.

The palatalized consonant phonemes in Estonian include t, s, n, l. Their pronunciation differs from that of the corresponding plain consonants by the addition of the simultaneous y-like effect caused by raising the middle of the tongue toward the highest part of the roof of the mouth. When pronouncing the palatalized t, the tip of the tongue is pushed against the upper teeth. The palatalized n is formed with the tip of the tongue against the upper teeth or alveolar ridge and the palatalized l – with the tip of the tongue against the gums. The place of articulation of the palatalized s is, in comparison with the plain s, more to the back – the front part of the palate.