

A case of *Verschärfung* in the Swedish dialect from Stora Rågö in Estonia

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From the 13th century until the 1940's, the northwestern coast of Estonia was inhabited by a Swedish population, speaking diverse Swedish dialects with many peculiar linguistic traits. There, on the small island of Stora Rågö, the local dialect was characterized by the insertion of consonant clusters -*ggv*- or -*ggj*- between vowels: e.g. *fruggver* 'wives' (singular *fru*), *liggjer* 'scythes' (singular *li*). Clearly, these stop insertions are almost identical in form to the insertions caused by the sound law known as *Verschärfung*, appearing in Old Norse and Gothic, as well as in modern Faroese. A study presented in Västerdal (2021) show that there are also close similarities regarding phonetic context and conditions for insertion to take place. It is therefore claimed that the stop insertions in the dialect of Stora Rågö (SR) is a fourth case of Germanic *Verschärfung*.

The term *Verschärfung*, or *Holtzmann's law*, describes a Proto-Germanic sound change found in Old Norse (ON) and Gothic (goth.). The sound change involved glides that developed into -*ggv*-/-*ggj*- in ON and -*ggw*-/-*ddj*- in goth., e.g. ON *tryggr*, goth. *triggws* 'trustworthy'; ON *tveggja*, goth. *twaddje* 'two' (Petersen 2002).

A later case of *Verschärfung* occurred in modern Faroese, where it is called *skerping*. In Faroese, stop insertions -*gv*- and -*ggj*- first appeared between two vowels in disyllabic words, e.g. *rógva* 'row', *nýggjur* 'new', but subsequently spread to monosyllabic words (Thráinsson et al. 2004).

Besides the similarities in the form of the stop insertions, there are also significant similarities regarding phonetic context between the stop insertions in SR and Faroese. In the latter, -*gv*- follows after the diphthongs /uu, ou/ and -*ggj*- after /ei, ui, ai, oi/, which are all monophthongized in this context (Thráinsson et al. 2004). In SR, -*ggv*- follows after /u, ʉ/ or a diphthong ending in /ʉ/. Equivalently, -*ggj*- follow after /i/ or a diphthong ending in /i/. All diphthongs preceding insertions are monophthongized before -*ggv*- and -*ggj*- (Västerdal 2021). At times, the similarities between SR and Faroese (Far.) are striking: e.g. SR *sjoggin*, Far. *sjógvin* 'the sea'; SR *biggar*, Far. *bíggjar* 'villages'. The results of the *Verschärfung* development in SR and Faroese seem closely related, yet there are no recordings of any contact between inhabitants of Stora Rågö and the Faroe Islands. Therefore it must be presumed that *Verschärfung* has developed spontaneously in both varieties, just as it has already been suggested that *skerping* in modern Faroese is a similar but separate development from the Old Norse *Verschärfung*.

In this presentation, the SR stop insertions and their phonetic context will be described and compared to the Old Norse, Gothic and Faroese equivalents. There will also be a brief discussion on the possible origins as well as the social and historical context that tentatively contributed to the development of *Verschärfung* in SR.

References

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