Factors in Finnish Nasal Place Assimilation

David Djabbari

In Finnish, nasal place assimilation occurs in external sandhi, where the final nasal assimilates in place. Before nonnasal sonorants, total assimilation occurs. This study is concerned with the effect of different phrasal boundaries on distribution of the durations of the vowel and the nasal-obstruent cluster.

Two speakers of the Finnish variant spoken in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (Pääkaupunkiseutu) were subjected to a reading task containing all relevant nasal + consonant sequences. The syncretic genitive/accusative forms were used to contrast direct objects from genitival attributes and adjectives. Results show that in genitival attributes and adjectives both absolute and relative durations of final nasals are shorter than in direct objects. Variation in duration is partly due to the relationship of Finnish word templates and the quantity system. Pauses occurred only after direct objects, thus before adjuncts, indicating that phrase boundaries and prosodic conditions are also at play, as direct objects are mostly associated with the status of new information.

These findings on the effect of syntactic position indicate potential evidence for an influence of information structure on segmental length in Finnish. This could lead to a more complete picture than in Suomi et al. (2008), where contrasts between thematic and rhematic accents are not discussed.

References


1University of Vienna, david.djabbari@oeaw.ac.at