

# Eliciting young urban Swedish using a map-task procedure

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## Introduction

Within quantitative sociolinguistics three central issues are to be considered when collecting data: eliciting the speaker's vernacular; overcoming the observer's paradox; and ensuring that the number of tokens enables robust statistical analysis (see full list of Labov's criteria in the Evaluation section below). The sociolinguistic interview (Labov 1984) has often been used together with more directed tasks, such as reading passages and word lists, however these solutions yield a bias towards a more formal context and careful speech style, which is far from optimal for sociolinguistic research (Labov 1972; Yaeger-Dror 2001). Casual speech is also more difficult to obtain when the power imbalance between speakers is greater (Eckert 2013), such as in an interview setting between an adult researcher and an adolescent.

*How then can we create a situation where we can control the language production and still keep the attention paid to speech at a minimum?*

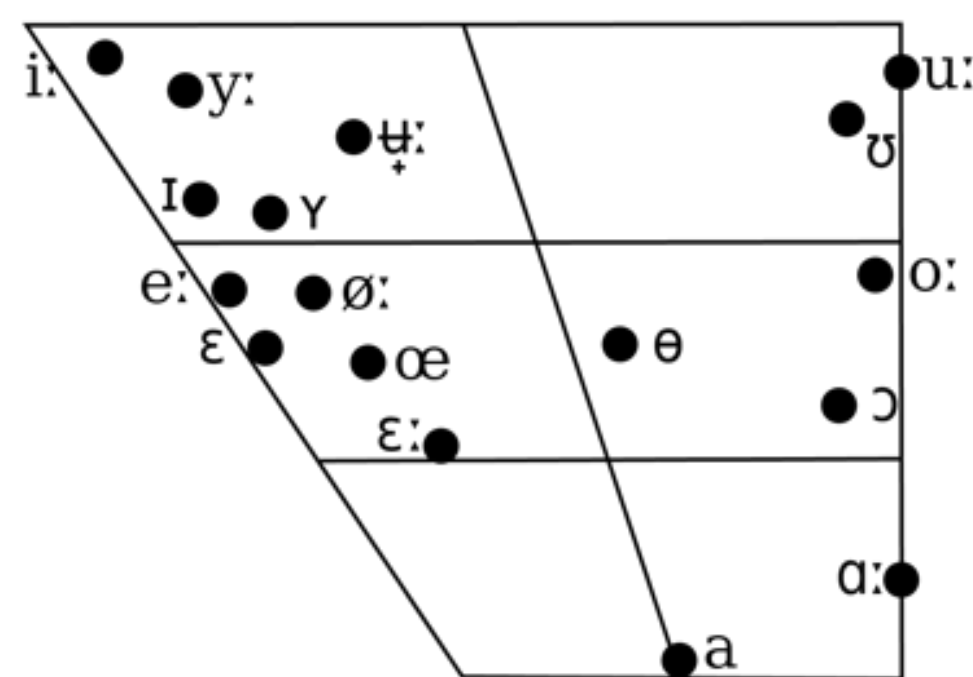


Figure 1. The long and short vowel phonemes of central standard Swedish (Engstrand 1999: 140-2). This project focuses on the 9 long vowels, and the two pre-rhotic allophones of /ɛ:/, [æ:], and /ø/, [œ] (not depicted here).

## Methodology

A new corpus of young people's speech, *Språkbruk i Stockholm och Göteborg* (SSG, 'Language Use in Stockholm and Gothenburg') was developed in order to investigate the 9 long vowels of Swedish (figure 1 above), and Swedish speakers' production of plosives in English. Within other areas of linguistics more experimental setups such as picture-tasks, maze-games and map-tasks have been used to elicit speech. While these are by no means new methods in linguistics and sociolinguistics (e.g. Anderson et al 1991; Grønnum 2009; Scobbie et al 2013; Nolan & Post 2013), we have created a more complex task (see figure 3). We have asked self-recruited pairs to describe a route on a map of unlabelled objects. The maps differ slightly, prompting both interlocutors to become more interactive in solving the task. In addition, as the task was carried out between friends, so we could expect to obtain the vernacular more than in interviews between a young person and a researcher (Nordberg 1980). We recorded interviews and map-tasks with 111 students between the ages of 16-19 at 4 schools: one in the centre and suburb of each city.



Figure 2. Map-task setup at school Kripke (left), and school Descartes (middle and right). The other setups for interviews and map-tasks were similar in nature, with informants unable to see each other yet in close proximity.

## Evaluation

Labov (1984: 50) criteria for rating sociolinguistic data collection methods:

- *Possibility of obtaining a representative sample:* given the fact that we were in a school setting, the sample is representative of the students in these areas
- *The demographic data obtained:* obtained in the interview section of the recordings
- *The comparability of the data obtained:* all informants were given the same task, in a comparable setting within their own school
- *Success in minimising the effects of observation:* informants were interviewed prior to the map-task recording, giving them an opportunity to familiarise themselves both with the recording setup and with the researchers involved. A subset were later interviewed about whether they felt the presence of the researcher during the map-task influenced their speech, most said no
- *The quality of the sound recorded:* Above the level required in order to perform acoustic analysis (see figure 4 for example). All recordings were made in the same way, using headset microphones, ensuring good quality, multi-channel recordings of two informants interacting with each other (see figure 2 above)
- *The volume of data obtained:* 111 informants, ~75h recordings, a mean of 160 vowel tokens per 30 minutes of map-task recording
- *The feasibility of including field experiments:* this was done, very feasible.



## Concluding remarks

Preliminary results show that on average, *each* speaker produces 160 usable vowel tokens over a 30 minute map-task recording (compared to approximately 40 in 30 minutes of *one* speaker's interview talk). Initial acoustic analysis of the two contexts/speaking styles shows higher token quality in the map-tasks as a larger number of vowel tokens are stressed (see example in figure 4 below). Furthermore, informants become more active and involved than in the interview. All results indicate that this is a robust method for eliciting sociophonetic data in spontaneous peer interaction.

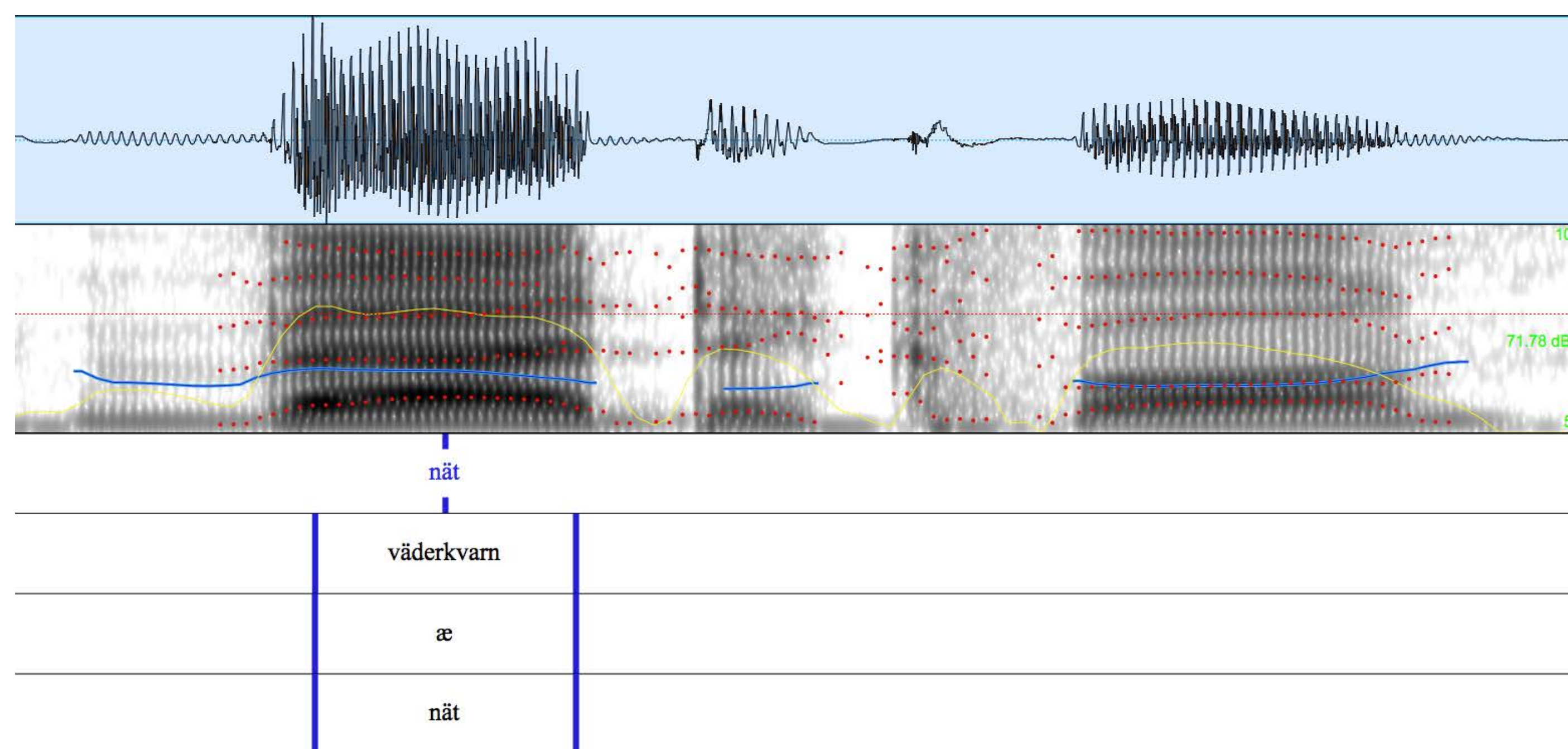


Figure 4. Spectrogram and oscillogram from one of the recordings. Gothenburg female producing <väderkvam> (windmill), containing the long vowel /æ/ (denoted in tiers 1 and 4 with the lexical set "nät" /nɛ:t/ produced as [æ] (impressionistically transcribed in tier 3 using IPA), segmented in Praat v.5.4.21 (Boersma & Weenink 2015).

## Bibliography

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