

# **The production of Estonian palatalization by Estonian and Russian speakers**

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I am interested in phonemes – the smallest meaningful units of a language. Words are made up of phonemes, and words have meanings that can easily be changed by making small adjustments in pronunciation. Sometimes, the changes in vowels or consonants occur when they are adjacent to other phonemes. For instance, a consonant can be palatalized near a high vowel. Palatalization is the reason Estonian has several orthographically similar word pairs like palk (palga) and palk (palgi) or sulg (sulu) and sulg (sule). My thesis concentrated on questions like: does the palatalization of a consonant only affect the consonant itself, or is it a part of a more extensive speech planning process? What are the main articulatory properties that describe Estonian palatalization?

I also wanted to know how native Russian speakers produce Estonian palatalization. The thesis is based on the hypothesis that Estonian palatalization is difficult for the native Russian learners of Estonian and contributes to their speech accent. Language acquisition models state that speech accent is present because of the effect that our native language has on our pronunciation. When we learn another language, we must constantly adjust our pronunciation to sound more natural. The results of the thesis showed that we unconsciously plan ahead of the movements of the tongue while speaking. We are constantly trying to be economical in how we speak, and we try to be quicker and smoother in articulating words and sentences. The results also showed that the changes that palatalization caused were mainly observable in the preceding vowel. The data also showed that the native language of the speaker affects the way we produce another language and contributes to speech accent. There was a lot of variation in the native Russian group. Some speakers did not use palatalization where necessary, and others did. The ones that did palatalize had a slightly different pronunciation than native speakers.