

## Swedish in America – past and present

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From the late 1800s throughout the early 1900s, 1.3 million people emigrated from Sweden to America. This means that a large proportion of the Swedish-speaking world at that time were actually living in America, and even today there is a significant number of Swedish speakers in America. Despite this, not much is known about American Swedish.

During the 1960s, Folke Hedblom and Torsten Ordéus made a number of recordings of American Swedish, mainly in Minnesota (where 4,5 % of the population were considered Swedish American in 1960, according to Hasselmo 1974) and Illinois (Hedblom 1963). This material, which consists of more than 300 hours of speech (see Hedblom 1981), is still available at the Institute for Language and Folklore in Uppsala. The material has been used in a number of smaller studies, which focus mainly on the preservation of dialect features in American Swedish (Hagren 1997, Hedblom 1970, 1978) or on attitudes to Swedish in America (Hedblom 1992). There is one larger study (Hasselmo 1974), which gives a general overview of phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic properties of the language of early immigrants. (Hasselmo's informants are all born in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.)

In the project *Swedish in America*, we study the Swedish language in the United States today. Our main aim is to investigate how today's American Swedish differs from the varieties spoken 50 years ago. In June 2011, we visit Minnesota to make a first set of new recordings. In this talk, we will give an overview of Swedish in America on the basis of these recordings. We discuss how the Swedish community has changed over the last century, and give examples of how the language of the Swedish Americans recorded 50 years ago differ from the Swedish of their present-day descendants, taking Hasselmo's study as one starting point. Our focus is on changes in the linguistic system more generally, and not on questions of how features of individual dialects have been preserved.

### References

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