Estonian Swedish, an endangered variety of Swedish once widely spoken in the coastal areas and islands of Estonia, retains several archaic features of Swedish, and shows apparent linguistic influences from Estonian. The present paper offers the first systematic investigation of Estonian Swedish rhythm, which has been impressionistically characterised as having a relatively even distribution of stresses and more frequent primary stress than e.g. Central Swedish [1]. Because of its contact with Estonian we hypothesise that Estonian Swedish is likely to be rhythmically intermediate between Central Swedish and Estonian.

Three recordings of older male Estonian Swedish speakers were analysed. The recordings are thought to date from the 1980s, and consist of read stories. Slightly over a minute of speech from each speaker was annotated, demarcating on separate tiers (a) vocalic and consonantal intervals, (b) phonological syllables, and (c) feet. The normalised Pairwise Variability Index (nPVI) was used as a rhythm metric (see e.g. [2] for details). Estonian Swedish values were compared with existing findings for Estonian [3] and for Swedish spoken by both native Swedes and by Estonian speakers living in Sweden [4].

The results show that the Estonian Swedish vocalic nPVI is indeed intermediate between those reported previously for Estonian and for Central Swedish, as is the syllable nPVI. Results for the foot show greater durational variation than in Estonian or Central Swedish, contrary to a possible prediction based on Lagman’s observation [1]. Discussion will focus on the phonological properties of Swedish and Estonian, and how these may be affecting the global measures of rhythm.

References