

Finnish dialectal epenthesis: two distinct types of vowel insertion

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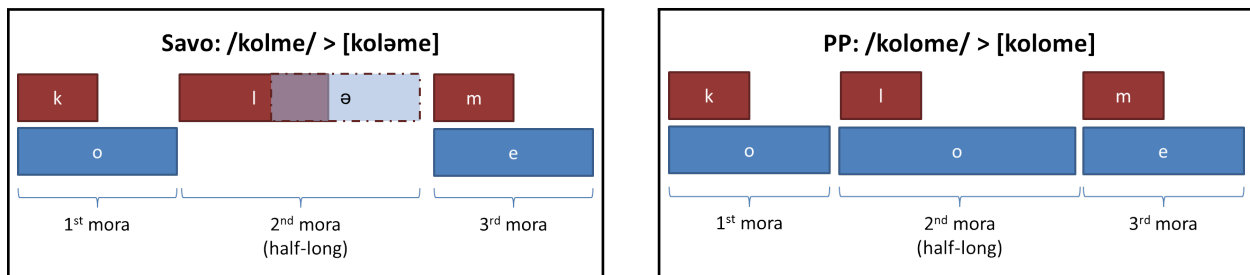
In the Savo and Pohjois-Pohjanmaa (PP) dialects of Finnish, words with shape $C_1VC_2C_3V$ are produced as $C_1VC_2\mathbf{v}C_3V$. In Savo dialects, the quality of \mathbf{v} is often between that of adjacent vowels (1a), while in PP dialects \mathbf{v} has the same quality as the preceding vowel (1b) (Harrikari 1999). Vowel insertion is limited to C_2C_3 position; later CC contexts do not trigger insertion (1c).

- (1)
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|----|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| a. | silmä | > silemä | ‘eye’ |
| b. | silmä | > silimä | ‘eye’ |
| c. | kuvitelma | > *kuvitelvma | ‘fantasy’ |

Although both are traditionally grouped under the label “epenthesis” (Suomi 1990), I argue that Savo and PP vowel insertion are two distinct processes with differing causes. Acoustic duration analyses of the inserted vowels show that Savo \mathbf{v} is inconsistently produced and is much shorter than other vowels, both hallmarks of excrescent vowels. In contrast, PP \mathbf{v} is consistently produced, and is actually longer than the first vowel of the word, suggesting that PP \mathbf{v} is phonological epenthesis. Complementing the acoustic evidence, other properties of the phonologies of these dialects corroborate this interpretation. I argue that both vowel insertion types are connected to another phenomenon exhibited by both dialects, second mora lengthening (SML).

In dialects with SML, speakers lengthen the second mora of a word to 1.5x the length of comparable segments, a so-called “half-long” segment (Suomi and Ylitalo 2004; Spahr 2012). In $C_1VC_2C_3V$ words, SML applies to C_2 ; however, consonants cannot be sustained like vowels. The result is a short, variable gap between C_2 and C_3 with no consonantal closure. The excrescent nature of Savo \mathbf{v} suggests that this gap, caused by SML, is the root cause of Savo \mathbf{v} . Linking vowel insertion and SML also accounts for why only C_2C_3 triggers vowel insertion (1c): no other consonant slot is lengthened; thus, there is no other underlap, and no additional excrescence.

SML also provides evidence for the phonological status of PP epenthesis. As previously described, PP \mathbf{v} is actually longer than the first vowel, patterning with other underlying second mora vowels. The schematic of the word *kolme* ‘three’ below illustrates the difference in the degree of phonologization between the two dialects. Savo \mathbf{v} is phonetic, and the lengths of C_2 and the excrescent vowel are variable; combined, they make up the second mora. However, PP \mathbf{v} is phonologized and functions alone as the second mora.



This novel approach combines phonetic and phonological analyses to tease apart the distinction between Savo and PP vowel insertion. Such an account unifies gesture-based and representational explanations of epenthesis and provides a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of vowel insertion.