

The current study is an preliminary examination of liquid consonants in Upper Sorbian, an endangered West Slavic language spoken in eastern Germany. Upper Sorbian is unique among Slavic languages in having acquired the uvular trill /ʀ/ through contact with German. Ultrasound tongue imaging data was collected from a single native speaker of the language. The recordings included words with the target phonemes /l, ʀ, ʀ^j/ in intervocalic environments a_a, e_e, and o_o. Eight repetitions of each word were elicited in the carrier phrase “Sym X měni!” (I have thought X). The analysis was based on average tongue contours at the point of maximum constriction – the peak displacement of the tongue during articulation of the target phonemes. The results show that the lateral, /l/, has a consistent apical target across vocalic contexts, but the tongue dorsum and body are subject to co-articulatory affects: the /o/ environment causes retraction of the tongue dorsum, compared to the /a, e/ environments, while the /e/ environment causes raising of the tongue body, compared to the /a, o/ environments. The results for the uvular rhotic, /ʀ/, indicate variation in the tongue dorsum target. The /a/ environment has lowering of the tongue dorsum, compared to /o, e/, and the /e/ environment has raising and fronting of the tongue dorsum target compared to /a, e/. In the /a, e/ environments, there is also clear retroflexion of the tongue tip, suggesting that there may be an apical component to uvulars in Upper Sorbian. This contrasts the articulation of /o/, which has a dorsal component similar to /ʀ/, but no apical gesture. The palatalized uvular trill, /ʀ^j/, shows much stronger tongue body raising than its nonpalatalized counterpart in all environments, and there is a clear lack of retroflexion of the tongue tip. The tongue dorsum is especially fronted, compared to /ʀ/ in the /o/ environment. Overall, the data suggests that both laterals and uvular rhotics are composed of the coordination of a tongue dorsum and tongue tip gesture. This is especially surprising for the uvular, which is not general described as having a tongue tip component. The tongue dorsum gesture is likely what gives liquids their vocalic properties, while the tongue tip gesture modifies the articulation to distinguish each of the phonemes. It is still difficult to determine if the palatalized rhotic is the merely a result of co-articulation with an adjacent /j/ or if there is a clear and distinct phonemic contrast between /ʀ/ and /ʀ^j/.