Idiolectal and generational changes in the light of real time data. The case study of 3rd person pronouns

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Sociolinguistic studies have mainly been based on data collected by the apparent time method, but thanks earlier variationist research, we can follow up on linguistic changes in individuals and communities at the light of real time corpora as well.

This study is based on a longitudinal corpus of Helsinki spoken Finnish. This corpus is not unique only from the Finnish perspective but also worldwide: the same speakers have been recorded three times, in 1970s, 1990s and 2010s. In addition, new groups of young people have been interviewed during the 2nd and the 3rd round of data collecting (16 informants in each case).

My case study concerns variation both in the individual and community level. I will focus on nine informants born in the 1950s who have been interviewed three times. The aim is to find out whether their language use has changed over the course. Their linguistic profiles will be related to tendencies in the larger corpus.

The variable in focus is the use of 3rd person pronouns. In standard Finnish, the pronoun "hän” is used for all human referents but in colloquial Finnish "hän” is used only in some pragmatically salient cases, while the demonstrative pronoun ”se” is used as a general third person pronoun instead. On the basis of the corpus collected in the 1970s, the youngest age group in Helsinki used ”hän” only marginally (Paunonen 1995). However, recent studies indicate that it is still favored e.g. in institutional situations. Is the variant ”hän” really disappearing or do we only see age-grading in its usage? In addition to presenting variation in the focus feature, I will consider methodological challenges of studying language change in the real time corpus.

Reference


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