Daily and weekly migration as a source of language variation: The case of Slovene

Maja Bitenc
Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The paper investigates the variability of the language repertoire of five geographically mobile speakers from the Idrija region with a distinctive Cerkno local dialect. The informants migrate daily or weekly for school or work to the capital, Ljubljana. The research focuses on different strategies of speech behaviour the informants use in communication with speakers of other varieties of Slovene.

With the aim of observing authentic language use and diminishing observer’s paradox, the technique of informants’ full-day self audio recording was used; its advantages and disadvantages are presented. The research corpus is based on text selection from the whole material, according to different circumstances: time, place, interlocutors, topic of conversation and formality of the situation. The central part of the investigation is the analysis of five phonological (three vowel and two consonant) variables. Besides this, attention is paid to some morphological variables and lexicon. Variation of informants’ speech is observed according to different circumstances as well as social and psychological factors. The qualitative data were gathered in sociolinguistic interviews and include informants’ sex, age, personal history, the time when they started migrating to the capital, social network, personal characteristics and language attitudes.

The results show that different types of speakers exist and that we can often speak about continuum-like transitions between the dialect and the standard. Different variables show different tendencies and different social and psychosocial factors prove to be relevant for the explanation of individuals’ language behaviour.

The Slovene (socio)linguistics is characterised by lack of systematic observation of the spoken language, its social and regional variability. The results of this pioneering variationist research project of Slovene thus make an important contribution to a more objective description of the real sociolinguistic picture of the Slovene language community and to understanding the nature of language variability.

Keywords: language variation, mobility, Slovene sociolinguistics.