Language variation in Swedish: A study of identity and language

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Traditional sociolinguistic studies focus on group differences, whereas the individuals drown in the material and never come to the surface. The variation paradigm has been criticized with arguments such as that it gives only a superficial understanding as the researcher loses the closeness to the material (Mæhlum 1992:99 ff.). It has also been noted that the traditional independent variables used seem not always to explain all the variation seen in the material. An individual centered approach has been tried for analyzing dialect variation in recent years (e.g. Røyneland 2004, Bockgård & Nilsson 2011 with references). Looking at the individual may give new perspectives and new blood to the variationist research.

I study dialect variation in the town of Vaasa in western Finland and the research belongs to a project called Urban dialects in the Swedish-speaking Finland, carried out at Åbo Akademi University. Vaasa has about 61 000 inhabitants, and about 25 % of them have Swedish as their mother tongue. I have interviewed 19 Swedish-speaking informants, 12 women and 7 men, born between 1947 and 1997. Previously (in press), I have done a cluster analysis where these 19 informants establish two different clusters regarding 9 linguistic variables. Concerning the traditional sociolinguistic independent variables, however, the informants have roughly the same background. Still they do not speak in the same way. In this paper I will present results about the identity of these informants and how it relates to and explains their linguistic differences.

References:


Keywords: identity, variation.