

Changing nature of idiolects in the light of Bayesian analysis

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Our paper deals with idiolectal variation and change in adulthood and the use of real-time methodology for idiolect research. It is essential that when observing individuals we use at least partly different methods from observing change at the community level. It is also important to define change in the idiolect in a new way.

The paper is based on two sociolinguistic real-time studies of two Finnic varieties: Häme dialects of Tampere as well as White Sea Karelian spoken in Russia. In the Tampere study, the data consist of 60 hours of recorded interviews with 30 informants who were interviewed twice, in the 1970s and in the 1990s. In the Karelian study, the data consist of 10 hours of recorded interviews with 5 informants who were interviewed in 2001 and in 2011.

In both studies, Bayesian statistics has been used to analyse the data. With its help, it is possible to describe the occurrence of each chosen variable on an individual level without sacrificing the social character of idiolects. Bayesian analysis enables the illustration of the error margin in idiolect studies. Massive group data is not essential to observe statistically significant change.

Our study shows that when the number of variables to be studied is sufficient and the measure of change used in the real-time study is accurate enough, idiolectal change is very likely to be observed. Furthermore, there is no upper age limit to idiolectal change. We found statistically significant changes also in the data collected among informants aged 70–90. Our results show that a language change and ethnic loyalty, language contacts and language attitudes intertwine distinctly. Our results also show that lability belongs to the basic character of the idiolect.