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How to study the relationship between language use and class distinctions?

Finland, like other Nordic societies, has traditionally been considered very equal, and talk of social classes and social inequality has long been almost a taboo. However, rapid changes in the economic structure and working life and migration both within Finland and from elsewhere have contributed to an increase in income disparities. Social segregation is not only manifested in differences in livelihoods but is also heard and reflected in language use and social relations. However, up-to-date information on the relationship between class distinctions and language use is lacking and the acquisition of the information is challenging.

Our paper discusses methods for identifying linguistic phenomena associated with social classes and class divisions in Finland. The aim is to approach social class from a holistic and intersectional point of view, so that not only traditional extralinguistic variables (e. g. occupation and education) but also aspects of ethnicity and immigration are included. Our study has emerged among a multidisciplinary research group which gathers and sociolinguists and sociologists from Finland. Our aim is to answer to the following questions:

1. How do class distinctions manifest in the use of Finnish and Finnish-Swedish?

2. Which linguistic and social resources are recognized and interpreted significant from the perspective of class distinctions?
3. How are classes constructed linguistically, socially and culturally?

In our paper, we will concentrate on recognition of the (linguistic) resources of Finnish associated with class distinctions (see question 2) from the methodological point of view. We will discuss *how* to find relevant linguistic phenomena. We have collected pilot data by questionnaires and listening tests and analyzed interview data in order to aim information on both conscious and unconscious concepts of Finns with different social and linguistic backgrounds.

In our paper, we will focus on the comparison of different methods and results achieved by them. Our preliminary results show that the following linguistic phenomena are frequently associated with class distinctions: grammatical correctness vs. grammatical errors, the extent of vocabulary, the use of standard vs. dialects as well as the use of swear words or slang. In our paper, we will evaluate different methods and consider possibilities to develop them.

Literature

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