

Plenary Talk

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Registers in contact: Methods and techniques for the analysis of intra-lingual and cross-lingual variation

Accounting for linguistic variation is a prime concern of functionally-oriented linguistics. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a framework for investigating linguistic variation with a focus on register variation, i.e., variation according to situational context. SFL has been engaged in the analysis of register variation for many years (e.g., Halliday 1985, Halliday and Martin 1993, Matthiessen 1993), proving that the framework is a powerful tool for analysing linguistic variation intra-lingually. Recent work on language typology, language contact as well as translation suggests that the register perspective may also be useful for describing cross-lingual variation, or at least some important aspects of it (see e.g., Matthiessen 2004, Steiner 2004, Teich 2003).

My talk has a descriptive and a methodological concern. In terms of description, I am essentially concerned with linguistic contact situations and the extent to which we can employ the concept of functional variation to describe the effects of such contact. I will discuss two superficially different types of contact – contact between registers within one language, on the one hand, and contact between different languages, on the other. Even though the first is essentially intra-lingual and the second cross-lingual, their linguistic effects can be shown to be similar, both resulting in linguistic variation. Second, at a methodological level, I will show that to describe the effects of intra-lingual and cross-lingual contact, we can employ similar methods and techniques. I will discuss some state-of-the-art corpus-based methods of analysis as well as explore more recent computational techniques from an area known as data or text mining. In particular, I will discuss corpus design, corpus annotation and corpus query as well as data analysis techniques such as feature selection, clustering and classification. Finally, I will assess how far the parallel drawn between intra-lingual and cross-lingual variation induced by register contact takes us in terms of describing and understanding emerging variation in language and what the limits of this perspective are.

References

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