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The register potential of linguistic change: Individual and group perspectives

Registers are language varieties associated with communicative situations. From the perspective of historical sociolinguistics, register change is a dynamic, ongoing process (Biber 2001). In this talk I will match register change with language changes in progress, which provide the language user with potential resources for making register-specific meanings in interaction. These can range from conventional, group-associational meanings to creative, self-conscious usages – the latter much discussed in third-wave sociolinguistics. However, to understand how creatively individuals use features undergoing change as register indicators or markers, we need to know how these features pattern in the language community at large and, ideally, how they are used by different social groups (Nevalainen, Palander-Collin & Säily 2018; Schilling 2018).

The topics I will address in my talk include (1) methods for locating potential (intra-)individual register variation, (2) register associations that individuals convey by their choices of incoming and outgoing variants, and (3) the kinds of linguistic change that tended to attract register-specific creativity in the material studied. My data come from the 18th-century extension of the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEECE), which encodes participant metadata, addressor–addressee relations, and certain aspects of the discourses carried out in this written channel. The findings show how writers deployed the register potential of different features undergoing change to both create and contribute to particular register associations in a given communicative situation.

References

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- Schilling, Natalie 2018. Investigating stylistic variation. In J. K. Chambers & Natalie Schilling (eds.), *The handbook of language variation and change*, 327–349. 2nd ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.