

English Abstract

Finnishes spoken and spoken about in Helsinki
Indexicality of language and social identities

Language is a central means through which we manage our everyday tasks and express our social relationships and identities. This book provides perspectives on the social processes through which our understanding of language and social identities are formed, maintained and modified. It spotlights ways in which people living in present-day Helsinki talk, and ways of talking about “Helsinki speak” and “Helsinki-ites”.

The chapters analyze video- and audiotaped conversations and interviews, ranging from interactions in multiethnic schools and youth centers to interactions in church events and social insurance offices. Data from elicitation tasks are also used. Voices of speakers of different age and gender, Helsinki natives and transplants are brought to the fore.

The book shows how social identities arise in interactions between people. For example, ethnic background, age and gender become intertwined with global cultural trends and local practices in specific interactions. The function of particular verbal practices is not constant but specified in the actual situations of use: linguistic signs are indexical. The chapters unpack oversimplified understandings of the relationship between language, social categories and space using methods of linguistic ethnography, interactional sociolinguistics, variation analysis, conversation analysis, socio-onomastics and language attitude research.

Dialogue between different methods runs throughout the book, making it possible to highlight phenomena not previously studied. Among them is the almost mythical “Stadiässä”, the nonstandard sharp, frontal pronunciation of /s/, which is shown to be a social construct that produces and renews the concept of the “Helsinki-ite”. Other topics covered in the book are for example perceptions of “foreigner talk”, the

interplay between slang and religious lexicon in interaction, and the practices through which speakers refer to and categorize themselves and each other in the course of interaction.

The volume is intended especially for those interested in linguistic and social scientific research, and it also provides new perspectives for all working on and interested in language and society.