

How network properties shape linguistic choices: the adoption of *kind of* and *towards* in Finnish social media networks

This study investigates how network properties influence advanced L2 users of English based in Finland and their networks on a social media platform. It revisits the classic strength-of-weak-ties hypothesis (Granovetter 1973; Milroy & Milroy 1985) by examining whether linguistic innovations are more strongly associated with weak-tie than strong-tie networks in large-scale social media data. The analysis focuses on two variables that represent opposing trends in the global spread of American English: (i) *kind of* / *kinda* vs. *sort of* / *sorta*, where the American variants dominate (Rohdenburg and Schlüter 2009), and (ii) *toward* vs. *towards*, where the originally British form has been gaining ground (Franco and Tagliamonte 2020). For the first variable, type noun uses are distinguished from downtoner uses.

The study draws from a corpus of over 400 million words covering over 2,500 Finnish users in one social media application. Variation is examined in the repertoires of egos and the other users in the network (alters), allowing user's alignment with their network to be assessed. The analysis combines descriptive statistics with advanced statistical modelling. Descriptive summaries illustrate the distribution of variants and alignment patterns, and the models test how these patterns are connected to network strength, size, and the ego's location type (urban vs. rural).

The results show that users overwhelmingly favor the incoming variants. Network strength does not substantially affect which variant is chosen, but it strongly predicts internal uniformity: loosely connected networks display more internal variation than tightly knit networks. The size at which this effect is most visible differs between variables, but users in smaller networks tend to align more closely with their alters. Correlation analyses reveal that the two otherwise unrelated innovations pattern together: users who favor *kind of* / *kinda* over *sort of* / *sorta* tend also to favor *towards* over *toward*.

References:

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