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## Language-internal multilingualism in Austria

### Abstract (English)

German is presumed to be one of the languages which is most rich in variation among European languages, and it is full of variation within each individual German-speaking country as well. As for Austria, variation comprises standard varieties as well as non-standard varieties. The resulting language-internal multilingualism, encompassing the whole spectrum from standard at the one end to dialect at the other end, is considered to be characteristic of Austria. Most Austrians are used to switching nimbly between these two ends of the continuum. As regards the standard level, Austrian speakers are not only familiar with Austrian Standard German but, due to language contact, to some degree also with German Standard German. Having an extensive linguistic repertoire concerning pluricentric German is obviously an advantage for speakers. At the same time, German Standard German has been observed to gain influence on Austrian Standard German, inducing generational language change in Austria. This contribution portrays the situation in Austria concerning variation within German, taking aspects of language use, language change and implications for language policies in Austria into consideration.

### 1. Introduction

When it comes to the role of German in Austria, the fact that German consists of a number of varieties makes the picture anything but monochrome: German is presumed to be one of the languages which is most rich in variation among European languages (Barbour/Stevenson 1998) and it is full of variation within Austria, like in the other German-speaking countries and regions. Variation comprises standard varieties as well as non-standard varieties, and the resulting language-internal multilingualism, encompassing the whole spectrum from standard language at the one end to colloquial varieties and/or dialect at the other end, is said to be characteristic of Austria (Wiesinger 1985; Ammon 2005; Muhr 2013). Moreover, there is not just one standard variety in German. In a large number of linguistic publications (Ammon 1995, 2005, Ammon et al. 2004, Ammon/Bickel/Lenz 2016; Clyne 1992, 1995, 2005; Schmidlin 2011; Kellermeier-Rehbein 2014, to mention but a few), German is conceptualised as a pluricentric language when describing the standard language (as opposed to non-standard varieties) consisting of three main standard varieties: German Standard German (GSG), Austrian Standard German (ASG) and Swiss Standard German (SSG). Recently, GSG has been observed to gain influence on ASG and this consequently plays a role in the

realm of language awareness and language use in Austria (de Cillia/Ransmayr in print). All of this points to a multi-layered picture when it comes to the linguistic variety within German found among Austrian speakers.

This article is concerned with German language use in Austria and the use of varieties of German in Austrian schools from various perspectives: To begin with, a brief overview is given of German in Austria. Then, the languages and varieties Austrian German teachers deal with in relation to their students will be outlined in order to demonstrate the degree of multilingualism present in the Austrian classroom. The second part of this article focuses on German standard varieties and their presence and use among students and teachers, including a discussion of language attitudes and preferential use of Austrian or German Standard German among German teachers and upper secondary school students. Finally, the influence of age and television consumption on ‘language loyalty’ towards Austrian Standard German will be laid out, demonstrating ongoing inter-generational language change in Austria.

## 2. Austrian German and German in Austria: a brief overview

Austria’s official language is German, as stated in article 8 of the country’s Federal Constitutional Law. Article 8, paragraph 1 lays down German as the official language of the Republic of Austria while in paragraphs 2 and 3, the languages of minority ethnic groups are officially recognised and are explicitly given particular emphasis. Since an amendment was added in 2005, *Österreichische Gebärdensprache* (Austrian sign language) has also been recognised as an official language. According to the last census (carried out in 2001), 95.5% of Austrian citizens were German-speaking.

In Austria, both the standard language and dialects can be used in many domains and there are numerous ‘in-between’ forms, which are usually referred to as colloquial German (“*Umgangssprache*”) (Ammon 2003, 166-168). The model most commonly used to describe linguistic German variation in Austria is the one of the so-called ‘dialect-standard continuum’. This model differentiates between Austrian Standard German, trans-regional colloquial language (*Umgangssprache*) and dialect. In this model, a three- or four-level polyglossia encompassing dialect (*Basisdialekt*, *Verkehrsdialekt*, *Umgangssprache*) and standard language is assumed (Steinegger 1998; Wiesinger 2006 [2008/2014]). Within this continuum, smooth shifts and switches between these levels are possible and quite common. Even though a precise description of the colloquial language (*Umgangssprache*) can be regarded as problematic, Ender/Kaiser (2009) have shown that *Umgangssprache* as a variety between dialect and standard is regarded as important by Austrian speakers, thus legitimising the three-level modelling including *Umgangssprache*.

As stated in the introduction, one of the topics covered in this article will be language contact between Austria and Germany and their respective standard varieties (Austrian Standard German, or ASG, and German Standard German, or GSG), as observed among school teachers and school students. In the literature, tentative references have been made to ongoing language change in Austria, suggesting that ASG is strongly influenced by GSG. It is often assumed that this could be due to the influence of the German media, predominantly German TV channels, on Austrians' linguistic behaviour and their 'language loyalty', or more precisely their loyalty towards the Austrian standard variety (Ebner 2008; Muhr 2003; Pohl 2011). Another reason might be that Germans have come to be the biggest group of immigrants to Austria since 2009,<sup>1</sup> showing a notable presence in Austria, especially in the big cities, with the effect that GSG is frequently heard not only on TV or on YouTube, but also in everyday life.

Most of the findings and results presented in this article are taken from the FWF-funded research project "Austrian German as a language of education and instruction",<sup>2</sup> which was carried out from September 2012 until April 2015 at the University of Vienna.

### 3. The concept of language-internal multilingualism

Linguists have stated that there is no such thing as a "monolingual" person with only one single form of a language in their linguistic repertoire. Given that there are different varieties within one and the same language (dialects and sociolects but also standard varieties), this phenomenon is referred to as "language-internal multilingualism" (*innere Mehrsprachigkeit*), a term dating back to Wandruszka's (1979) description of "a dynamic polysystem [...] in which the language varieties of various speech communities in various contexts we belong to interact with each other"<sup>3</sup> (Wandruszka 1979, 314, quoted by Riehl 2014, 17).

According to this notion, nearly all individuals are proficient at using a number of different varieties of a language, together with different registers in the language or varieties they know, and of switching between varieties and between registers in the appropriate context (Kemp 2009, 13). The variety we choose to use depends on who we speak to in which situation and, of course, on our individual linguistic repertoire. Research on linguistic repertoires has led to studies on linguistic biogra-

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.statistik.at/web\\_de/statistiken/menschen\\_und\\_gesellschaft/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsstruktur/bevoelkerung\\_nach\\_staatsangehoerigkeit\\_geburtsland/index.html](https://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/menschen_und_gesellschaft/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsstruktur/bevoelkerung_nach_staatsangehoerigkeit_geburtsland/index.html); <https://oesv1.orf.at/stories/443726> (both last accessed 19.8.2018).

<sup>2</sup> <https://oesterreichisches-deutsch.bildungssprache.univie.ac.at/home/> and de Cillia/Ransmayr (2019).

<sup>3</sup> "ein dynamisches Polysystem [...], in dem die Sprachen verschiedener Sprachgemeinschaften, der verschiedenen Lebenskreise, denen wir angehören, ineinandergreifen" (translation JR).

phies and language awareness as well as to the methodological development of a multi-modal approach to linguistic biographies, using the method of “linguistic portraits” (*Sprachenportraits*), which have especially been applied when working with adults by the Viennese research group “*Spracherleben*” (Busch 2013). Some linguistic portraits will be used in this article to illustrate and visualise language-internal multilingualism found in individuals.

As for German in Austria and the realm of school and education, a specific curriculum was drawn up by Krumm/Reich (2011) called “*Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit*” (“multilingualism curriculum”) which does not only include external multilingualism and how to best deal with it and make pupils benefit from it (especially concerning migrational languages) but also explicitly refers to language-internal multilingualism regarding German in Austria.

A point which needs to be stressed is that the phenomenon of language-internal multilingualism is not restricted to Austria – there is language-internal multilingualism basically in speakers of any language.

#### 4. Language-internal multilingualism in Austrian schools

Schools are one place where multilingualism plays quite an important role. To quote de Cillia, “in the same way that individuals and societies/states are multilingual, schools are multilingual” (de Cillia 2014, 9).<sup>4</sup> Let us take a look at the linguistic mix found in Austrian classrooms as revealed by the research project “Austrian German as a language of education and instruction”. Apart from the different languages found among pupils in Austrian schools, we can clearly see the presence of language-internal multilingualism. In the survey, German teachers from all school types were asked about the languages and varieties they deal with in their classrooms. The answers to choose from were dialects, colloquial language (“*Umgangssprache*”), Austrian Standard German (“*österreichisch geprägtes Standarddeutsch*”), German Standard German (“*bundesdeutsch geprägtes Standarddeutsch*”), Swiss Standard German (“*schweizerisch geprägtes Standarddeutsch*”) and languages other than German (“*andere Herkunftssprachen als Deutsch*”).<sup>5</sup> Figure 1 shows the teachers’ estimations. The variety which was mentioned by 100% of our participants was “colloquial language”, indicating that all German

<sup>4</sup> So wie Individuen und Gesellschaften/Staaten prinzipiell mehrsprachig sind, sind es auch die Schulen [...] (translation JR).

<sup>5</sup> Multiple answers were permitted to this question. In the survey, teachers were given the option of differentiating their answers on each variety between “frequently”, “a little” and “not at all”. As this article aims to introduce a general picture, both positive answers “frequently” and “a little” were added up to form one group. For more specific results, see de Cillia/Ransmayr (2019) or de Cillia (2015).

teachers in our survey noticed colloquial language being used by students in classroom situations. The overwhelming majority of teachers also chose the answers “Austrian Standard German” (96.2%) and “dialects” (93.8%). While a significantly smaller percentage of teachers claimed to notice some degree of “German Standard German” use among their pupils (44% in total, of which 40.8% stated “a little” and 3.2% “frequently”), hardly anyone had observed “Swiss Standard German” in the classroom (3.8%). A total of 87.9% of teachers stated that their students used languages other than German in the classroom (as shown in Fig 1). The picture obtained in terms of variety within German and its representation in an Austrian classroom clearly points to the prevalence of the dialect-standard continuum in the form of a nearly equal presence of colloquial German, dialects and Austrian Standard German, the latter being slightly challenged by German Standard German.

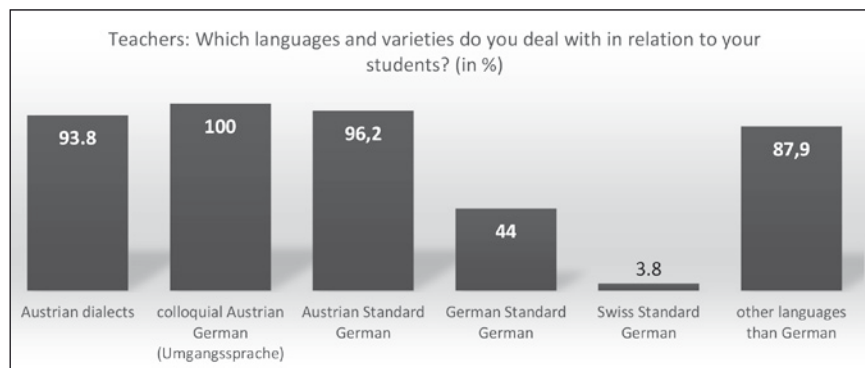


Fig. 1: Students’ languages and varieties according to teachers’ estimations; multiple answers permitted (in %)

As already mentioned in section 3, a method often used in the educational realm to elicit and portray the linguistic repertoire found in an individual is to work with “linguistic portraits”. When using with this method, a person is given the (empty) outline of a man/woman/child and is asked to put or draw all of the languages and varieties they have in their repertoire and which play a role in their lives into this silhouette. The aim is mainly to make an individual’s or a group’s collection of languages and varieties visible, showing appreciation for all languages and varieties and increasing language awareness in this individual or in the group.

The following portraits demonstrate how participants managed to make their linguistic repertoire visible. They also demonstrate the degree of language-external and language-internal multilingualism present.



Fig. 2: Linguistic portrait (source: Krumm/Jenkins (eds.) 2001; Red circles inserted by author, anonymised by author)



Fig. 3: Linguistic portrait (source: [www.agtv.vic.edu.au/files/Website%202015/oed.pdf](http://www.agtv.vic.edu.au/files/Website%202015/oed.pdf); red circles inserted by author)

What the portrait in Figure 2 demonstrates beautifully is that this person has gained quite a substantial degree of awareness of language-internal multilingualism, shown by the fact that not only “*Deutsch*” (German) was written down and included in the silhouette, but also “*österreichisch*” (Austrian) and even “*Oberösterreichisch*” (Upper Austrian, referring to Upper Austria as one of the federal states of Austria and thus to a regional variety of German). The same applies to the portrait in Figure 3: This individual has found a way of not only portraying all the languages and varieties he/she considered worth mentioning. He/she also managed to make the emotional dimension visible connected to “*Österreichisch*” (Austrian) and “*Niederösterreichisch*” (Lower Austrian, referring to a regional variety of Austrian German spoken in the federal state of *Niederösterreich*/Lower Austria) by using colours and the red heart so as to express that he/she carries Austrian and Lower Austrian in his/her heart. Interestingly enough, this person also listed German – High German (“*Deutsch – Hochdeutsch*”) as opposed to “Austrian” as part of his/her linguistic repertoire.

As described in section 2, most Austrians have a linguistic repertoire in relation to German which also encompasses German Standard German variants and features, and most people would have at least receptive competence in dealing with and understanding and knowing German Standard German words. The fact that individuals perceive German to consist of (at least) two (standard) varieties is also reflected in some linguistic portraits, for example in the upper section of the following:



Fig. 4: Upper section of a linguistic portrait (source of full portrait: [www.brgtraun.at/archiv/archivdetails/news-info/6c-brg-meets-3c-nms-st-martin.html](http://www.brgtraun.at/archiv/archivdetails/news-info/6c-brg-meets-3c-nms-st-martin.html))

The co-existence of more than just one standard variety is present in everyday life in Austria, for example when it comes to media consumption. However, it also manifests itself in the form of several words and phrases at hand in people’s repertoires to choose from depending on the context. The question as to whether there is language change in Austria, closely related to media influence, in the form of German words and phrases replacing Austrian ones, was looked into in the research project mentioned and will be dealt with in the next section.

## 5. Language change due to language contact? Use of ASG and GSG among students and German teachers

Apart from looking at the dialect-standard spectrum in German lessons, a major project module focused on the standard language and the pluricentric varieties of German in the school context as well as language contact-induced language change in Austria among teachers and students. Language contact and contact of varieties between Austria and Germany are mostly seen as being due to the media and, to a lesser degree, possibly due to the fact that the largest group of immigrants in Austria is Germans.

In this part of the project, students and teachers were given sentences containing 26 pairs of ASG and GSG variants and were asked to underline the variant (ASG or GSG) they would rather use in a written text. Of course, a survey with a sample of variants this small is mainly exploratory in nature and cannot be regarded as representative for actual language use among Austrians without additional studies; for a truly representative study, a much larger sample would be needed. The aim of these items was to pick up on tendencies concerning language change among students and teachers. The corresponding research questions regarding possible language change using these sample sentences were whether age-related tendencies pointing to language change could be found, and whether such age-related language change tendencies, if found, were correlated to TV-watching habits.

The choice of variants in our study was based on the principles that the variants (both ASG and GSG) should be known to the participants, they should be taken from the participants' everyday lives and that the sample should contain variants which the team of investigators had observed to be prone to language change.

The analysis of our results showed unexpectedly strong and statistically significant differences among teachers and students concerning their preferred variants ( $p < 0.000$ ): not only was the average number of preferred GSG variants higher among students than among teachers, but students turned out to prefer more GSG variants in total (54%) than ASG variants (46%) compared to teachers, of whom a clear majority (61.2%) preferred ASG variants to their GSG counterparts (38.8%). This supports the hypothesis of stronger 'language loyalty' or rather 'loyalty towards the ASG variety' among language experts (teachers) and the older generation (as shown in Fig. 5).

In our investigation we found hints, however, that generation-specific language change is going on. There are some obvious domains of contact, and some other factors have come up in recent years (YouTube, social media) which may accelerate or reinforce language change. Apart from TV and children's books and CDs, especially YouTube seems to have a tremendous impact on language use among young people. We know from studies that the roles of parents and kindergarten teachers and school teachers has to "compete" to a large extent with the influence of peers, starting from about the age of 7-8 onwards. It can be assumed that such



peers do not only include friends at school and in the neighbourhood, but that peers may also include people speaking in YouTube videos, which a substantial number of young people watch frequently. Concerning German YouTube videos (comedians, videos making fun of stuff, tutorials for homework, etc.), most of the speakers come from Germany.

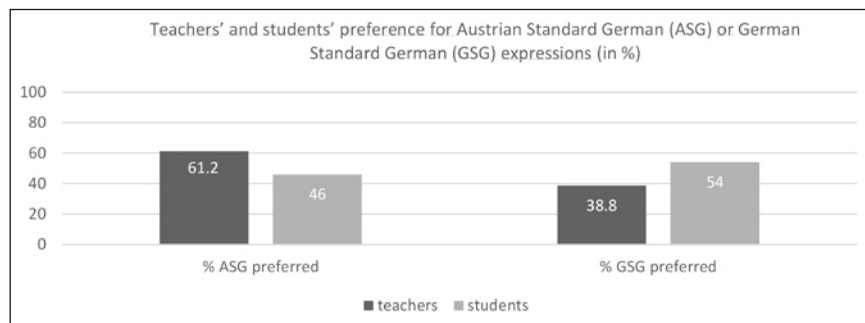


Fig. 5: Teachers' and students' preference for Austrian Standard German (ASG) or German Standard German (GSG) expression (in %)

In the study presented, YouTube was not included in the survey question as it was not yet a major factor when the study was designed. From today's perspective, it would obviously be included for possible correlations between YouTube consumption and "language loyalty" or "loyalty towards specific variants".<sup>6</sup> As stated above, a clear division regarding language use in these 26 variant pairs between student and teachers became obvious in the first analysis. In order to be able to look more closely at generation-specific differences, in a next step all participants, students and teachers, were split into three age cohorts (14-21 year olds, 22-40 year olds, 41-65 year olds) so that two 'generations' could be constructed and analysed for the purpose of a relational generation concept. Two of these 'generations', the youngest age cohort (14-21 year olds) and the oldest age cohort (41-65 year olds) were compared in a next step: a statistical analysis was performed, again with the aim of spotting the actual differences between the younger and the older generations in this sample as regards ASG or GSG preference in the 26 variant pairs.

Another of the research questions aimed to find out if there was a correlation between a tendency towards GSG variants among younger people and their media consumption. Therefore one survey question was concerned with the TV channels

<sup>6</sup> The latter term "loyalty to variants" was coined by Schmidlin, a Swiss linguist, who found out that people in the border regions between Switzerland/Germany and Austria/Germany were most loyal to "their" national variant, despite being familiar with the variant predominantly used in the neighbouring state just across the border.

the participants watched most frequently to ascertain whether there was a statistical correlation between language preferences and media consumption. As it turned out, a significant correlation was found ( $p < 0.000$ ): those students (14-21 year olds) who said that they mostly watched Austrian TV channels showed a slight preference for ASG variants (51% ASG variants, 49% GSG variants) while students who said they watched mostly German TV channels tended to clearly prefer GSG variants (60% GSG variants, 40% ASG variants), as shown in Figure 6. To conclude, the results indicate that TV consumption does influence language use, language attitudes and probably language change significantly.

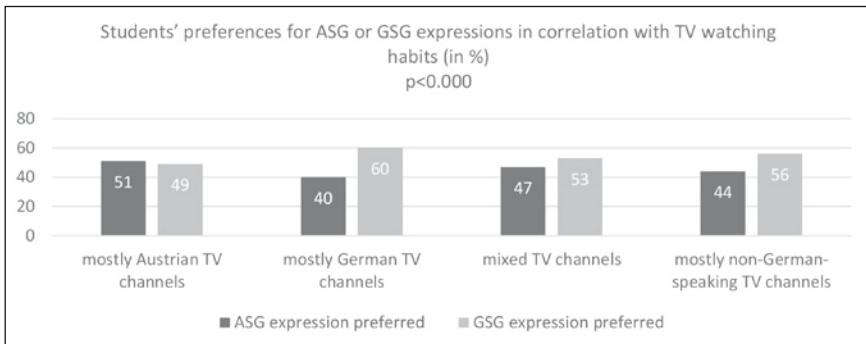


Fig. 6: Students' preferences for ASG or GSG expressions in correlation with TV watching habits

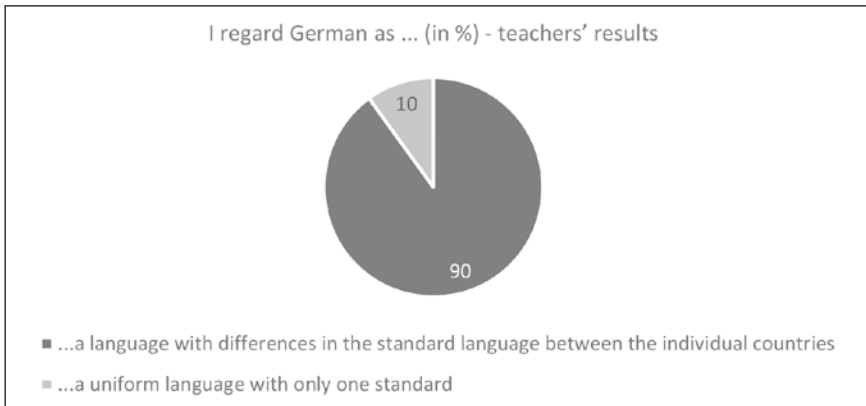


Fig. 7: Conceptualisation of German among teachers

However, when asked to conceptualise the German language, the vast majority of teachers agreed that there was more than one standard variety in German as opposed to conceptualising German as a uniform language with just one standard.

Figure 7 shows the results for the teachers, and even though the numbers were slightly lower for the students, they conceptualised German as a pluricentric language on the whole as well.

## 6. Normative conceptions among teachers and a conflict in “language loyalty”

Since teachers are generally regarded as linguistic norm authorities, the question of how they deal with pluricentric variation when it comes to strictly normative, prescriptive contexts, such as marking student essays, is important. In the survey, the teachers were given a constructed student text for correction. The short narration (approximately 200 words) contained a substantial amount of specific and non-specific standard variation, both on a lexical and grammatical/morphological level. All of the expressions in question were codified as standard language in the relevant dictionaries. It is important to point out that this text did not contain any orthographic or grammatical mistakes at all. Nevertheless, the range of “corrections” teachers felt necessary to apply was startling: while a few teachers did not make a single correction, others “corrected” up to 14 “mistakes”; if the items marked as inappropriate (but not “mistakes”) are included, some teachers made up to 25 interventions.

One of the aspects we analysed, among a wide range of other potential correlations, was the age factor in connection with exonorm orientation and the alleged conception among teachers that national or pluricentric variation represents deviations from “the norm”.

The results partially confirmed that there seems to be some exonorm orientation among teachers of German in Austria. Figure 8 illustrates that a substantial number of both ASG and GSG expressions were marked as inappropriate by the teachers, all age groups marking between 15 and 19% of ASG expressions as not quite appropriate in the text. Interestingly enough, though, there is a clear and significant tendency in connection with age: the older the teachers are, the more likely they are to mark GSG expressions as unsuitable ( $p=0.048$ ). The oldest age group marked more than twice as many GSG expressions (36.6%) as being inappropriate compared to ASG expressions. In other words, younger teachers (22-31 year olds) seem to have more tolerance and acceptance of GSG than older teachers. Older teachers conversely appear to be “more loyal” towards ASG than younger teachers (Fig. 8).

When it comes to marking expressions as “mistakes”, the results are not as clear cut at first glance. All age groups marked more ASG expressions as “mistakes” than GSG expressions, which could be due to the choice of items as some were cases of “borderline standard”. However, it is again the youngest teachers (22-31 year olds) who displayed the biggest discrepancy between GSG and ASG corrected as “mistakes” (Fig. 9).

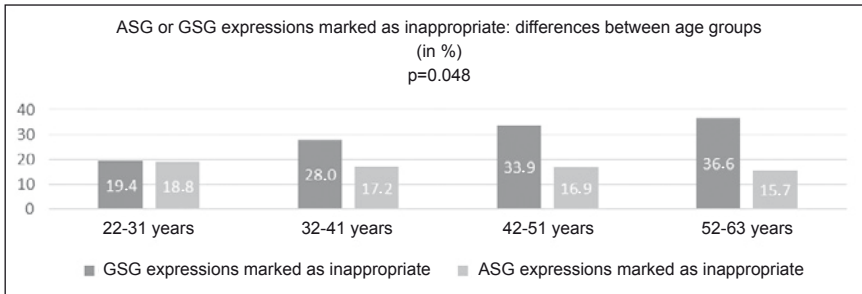


Fig. 8: ASG or GSG expressions marked as inappropriate: differences between age groups (in %)

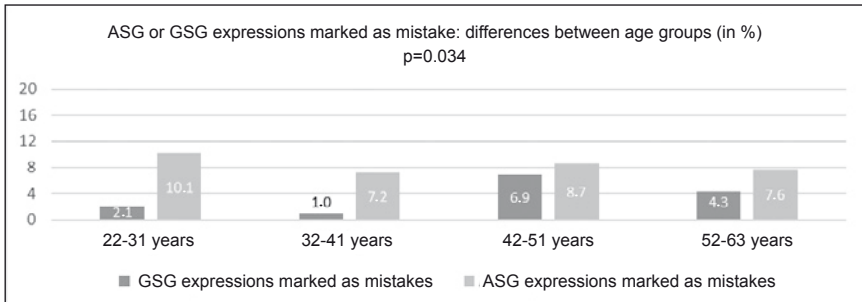


Fig. 9: ASG and GSG expressions marked as mistake: differences between age groups (in %)

## 7. Summary and conclusion

Firstly, this contribution showed that there is a wide spectrum of language-internal multilingualism in Austria, in everyday life as well as in schools. Individuals have a large linguistic repertoire and some awareness of their language-internal multilingualism, even more so when activities are performed to enhance language awareness, like working with linguistic portraits as shown in section 3.

In the data presented in the second part of this contribution, attitudes towards Austrian Standard German (ASG) in relation to language preferences were particularly in focus. As outlined, indications of generation-specific language change were found, suggesting a current tendency for some GSG variants to gradually replace some ASG variants and a higher degree of acceptance of GSG expressions among the younger generation. The statistically significant correlation between a preference for German Standard German (GSG) variants and media consumption proved to be an interesting result which demands further investigation.

Studies have shown that a positive attitude toward one's own language/variety as well as identification with one's own language/variety is important for language maintenance and that language loyalty is regarded as an essential socio-psychological factor for the survival of languages or varieties when 'threatened' (cf. Dressler/de Cillia 2006; Brenzinger 1997; Fishman 1964; Löffler 2016). This implies that language awareness activities resulting in the appreciation of all kinds of varieties is absolutely relevant, especially for the educational domain, where language attitudes are significantly shaped.

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